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THE
AMBASSADOR'S WIFE.

VOL I.



THE
AMBASSADOR'S WIFE.

BY MRS. GORE,

AUTHOR OF "THE DOWAGER," "MRS. ARMYTAGE," &c.

"Vaulting ambition that o'erleaps itself,
And falls on t'other side."

SHAKSPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE

AMBASSADOR'S WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

And motherless she grew from girlhood, e'en
To woman's fair maturity; nor dream'd
The measure of her loss in lacking thus
That Providence of love which Heaven's best care
Still leaves most needful.

MARLOWE.

IN one of the northern duchies of the German empire, no matter whether rejoicing in the prefix of Saxe or Hesse, stands the seigneurial mansion of the Barons von Rehfeld; an edifice admirably calculated to grace one of the sweeping champaign landscapes of Rubens, or adorn the background of the hunting pieces of Snyders or Wouverman.

VOL. I.

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Schloss Rehfeld is situated in a highly cultivated plain, isolated from the surrounding corn-fields only by a fosse and stone-dyke; the platform being sheltered on all sides by sloping woodlands, whose forests of intermingled pines and beech have for ages afforded the pleasures of the chase to the Barons of Rehfeld, during those eight months of the year in which the duties of chamberlainship did not chain them to the precincts of the court, in the diminutive city which, for mystery sake, we shall Germanize under the name of the Residenz.

The mansion house of Schloss Rehfeld, of considerable extent and some two centuries' antiquity, is constructed of small red bricks, coped and ornamented with freestone; which, in a peculiarly dry atmosphere and upheld with the orderliness of a prosperous estate, maintains to this day its freshness, as if existent only on the immortal canvass of the artists already cited. Time has done little to the old mansion, except supply successive

Barons von Rehfeld,—Wilhelms,—Albrechts, and Eberhards—to its domination ; and, in process of time, their portraits to its family gallery.

Till within these few years, the progress of civilization was little perceptible in its arrangements. All it had been when the troops of Gustavus Adolphus scoured the domain shortly after the erection of the baronial mansion, it remained when those of Napoleon traversed it, at the commencement of the campaign that left so lasting a scar upon the military fame of most military Brandenburg.

On this last occasion, however, the house of Rehfeld had a direful leaf to inscribe in its annals, connected with the incursion. The young Baroness, on the eve of becoming for the first time a mother, was so overwhelmed by the agitation of the event, and the tumults thus strangely interrupting the monotonous tranquillity of those stagnant solitudes, that, two days afterwards, the courier which

bore to the Residenz, where the Baron was in official attendance on the Grand Duke, tidings that he was father of a daughter, acquainted him that the body of his beloved Agnes was already in its coffin.

The visitation was two-fold. The Baron had set his heart upon an heir ; and though the last man on earth to be encumbered with such an appendage, was the widowed father of a girl ! It was a deep affliction. He scarcely knew which most to deplore—the death of his wife, or the survival of his child.

The Baron von Rehfeld was a grave, matter-of-fact man, who, nevertheless, had married for love ! Most men, even of the most arid nature, once in their lives or so, betray some weaker or gentler point—the vulnerable heel of the hero—the foot of clay of the brazen idol ; and the Baron, though proud of his two-and-twenty descents as becomes a man honourably recorded in the annals of Ratisbon, had chosen his wife from the family of an

humble minister of the gospel of the Lutheran church.

He had not, however, the greatness of mind indispensable to uphold so independant a choice. The inconsistent man soon made it apparent, both to the world and his wife, that it was only by a capitulation of principle he had renounced his prejudices of caste. From the moment of his marriage, he separated poor Agnes absolutely and entirely from her family ; and after the brief and formal presentation at court exacted by the kindness of his sovereign, of whom he was a favourite, consigned her to Schloss Rehfeld, while he pursued his official career at the Residenz.

Though the married life of the Baroness comprised little more than a year, it had been chequered by many gloomy moments. The young heart, snatched from amid a cordial family, had drooped in the cheerlessness of that isolated home. Her affection for the husband so much her superior in condition, was tempered

by awe; and during the last three solitary months preceding her confinement, left amid the terrors of war to the protection of her household, she had become by degrees so depressed in soul as well as so feeble in body, that death had an easy conquest of it. Though but nineteen years of age, Agnes resigned herself to die, as heart-weary of the world as if threescore and ten had passed over her head.

It was to the nurse who had watched over his own childhood and who, at fifty years of age, was still active as a girl, that the Baron von Rehfeld assigned the care of his daughter. He was not, perhaps, wholly without hope that, on some future day, a doleful letter from Sara might acquaint him that the frail infant had rejoined its young mother in the grave. But the less ardent his paternal affections, the more surely the nursling thrived and prospered; and when, five years afterwards, the blessings of peace enabled the Baron, then progressing towards his thirtieth year, to pass

the hunting season on his estates, the first object that struck him on entering the fine old hall, was a little fairy thing with long flaxen ringlets hanging almost to its feet, which he would have been tempted to fall down and worship as supernatural, had not old Sara prompted the lovely child to demand a blessing from her father.

In a moment, Ida was in her father's arms ; and from that day, he seemed to abjure his former regrets concerning the sex of his offspring. The little girl was of such singular beauty, such rare intelligence, that, even as a stranger, it would have been difficult not to be attached by her caresses. How much more so, when every feature reminded him of Agnes—the only human being he had ever loved—and when the child addressed him with tender appellations and endearments, now becoming unfamiliar to his ear. It required no great effort on the part of the attached Sara to render the child an object of deep affection to the Baron.

It was soon discovered in the establishment, and even among the tenants, that no concession was to be obtained from the Baron, except through the medium of the little girl. The task of the innocent Ida was one of daily intercession. She had to screen the guilty, and protect the unfortunate. Though scarcely able to lisp, she was already an Influence.

When once a hard minded man surrenders himself to a domination of this tender nature, he seems to take pride in making himself a greater slave than other people.

Rehfeld appeared to glory in subjecting himself to the caprice of his beautiful child; and Ida was soon as completely spoiled, as if she had not been the offspring of a man who had been ashamed of his wife, and discontented with the daughter she had bequeathed him. His country neighbours, nay, even the courtly friends and kinsmen who accompanied him occasionally from the Residenz to share the hunting parties and carousing of Schloss Rehfeld, seemed to emulate his infatuation

for the unearthly-looking being who haunted that grim solitude like a spirit of peace.

Till she was fifteen years old, Ida von Rehfeld never once quitted the old mansion. From the pastor of the village, she derived all the instruction which Sara was unequal to bestow; and singularly enough, the education of that fair girl was pretty nearly the same as would have been bestowed on a young Baron, had her father's prayer been propitiated by the birth of a son. The venerable huntsman, who had been her father's preceptor, taught her to ride, and even instructed her in the use of the rifle and cross-bow; while Herr Vossius imparted as large a share of classical learning as would probably have required the aid of a smart cane, or considerable expenditure of birch, to infuse into the mind of the heir of the estate. Every summer, her father made his appearance at the Schloss, armed with new music, new books, new tapestries, new trinkets; and was enchanted to perceive that

the instructions bestowed by the *Kapellmeister*, who accompanied him, had so far prospered during his absence, as to leave her an excellent musician.

Ida was now a beautiful girl—a girl who almost reconciled him to her not being a boy; active and intelligent as she was lovely; and if a little wilful, not more so than might be expected, considering the absolute authority she was allowed to exercise in the establishment.

The pretty Fraulein had scarcely completed her fifteenth year, when, as she was anxiously awaiting the arrival of her father for the commencement of his autumnal hunting party, a letter from the Baron acquainted her that, instead of being accompanied by his usual friends, or projecting his ordinary stay of some weeks at the château, he should bring with him only a single person, and remain there but a single day. For the first time, his visit was preceded by no baggage waggon—no

batterie de cuisine—no French cook—no plate chest—none of his usual appurtenances of festivity.—A few cases of books and musical instruments—addressed to “Mademoiselle Thérèse Moreau”—were the sole harbingers of his approach.

The mystery was soon unravelled. The Baron von Rehfeld had accepted a diplomatic mission at the court of St. Petersburg; and even as he had been content to renounce the society of his only child, in order to fortify her constitution in youth by a purer air than that of the Residenz, he was now unwilling to expose her to the hazards of a rude climate and hasty removal from her native country. His mission in Russia was of a temporary nature. It was unlikely that he should be more than twelve months absent; and he had accordingly determined upon leaving Ida at Schloss Rehfeld, under the guardianship of Herr Vossius whose presbytery was only a few hundred yards distant from the house.

The Baron was not, however, disregardful that the coming year was one of peculiar importance to a girl so singularly educated as his young heiress. The high distinctions to which she might hereafter pretend at the court of the Residenz, rendered it indispensable she should become neither a pedant nor a hoyden ; and in order to remedy these deficiencies, which suddenly occurred to him as likely to have arisen under the presidency of Vossius and the old nurse, he had obtained from Paris, through the intervention of the lady of the French envoy at ———, a governess of mature age and eminent accomplishments, to become during his absence, the companion of Mademoiselle von Rehfeld ; a measure which, in the opinion of the worthy Sara, added insult to injury !—

That they should not only be left behind, but left under the surveillance of a *gouvernante*, was an offence the old nurse of the Baron found it difficult to pardon. Nevertheless,

when her lord eventually made his appearance, his habitual influence over her mind soon subdued her rebellious feelings to subordination ; while as to the governess, as to “ *Mademoiselle Thérèse*,” she proved to be a person so sprightly, courteous, and sociable, that it would have been difficult for even the most contentious old woman in the world to pick a quarrel with her.

A life spent in tuition in one or two of the first families in France, had so accustomed her to the task of conciliating refractory spirits, that she found little difficulty in converting the prejudiced German nurse into a confederate ; and the wild, but graceful and intelligent *Ida*, into a cheerful and promising pupil.

Though *Mademoiselle von Rehfeld* beheld the departure of her father for so long a journey with the deepest regret, her tears were soon dried by the kindly assiduities of her new companion ; and she was willing to admit the wisdom of the Baron, in providing her such a substitute for his society.

The lessons which Ida had to receive, were purely superficial. The foundations of a solid education had been too carefully laid by the pastor to admit of any attempt at interference on the part of the French governess, to whom her pupil appeared a prodigy of learning. But the fair young German had a thousand trivial accomplishments to acquire, the exposition of which was as pleasant to Mademoiselle Thérèse, as to her docile scholar; and so eager was the application of the young recluse, apprized for the first time of her deficiency in the usual branches of female education, that after a few months, the kind-hearted Mademoiselle Thérèse could scarcely persuade herself, that the fruits she saw so rapidly approaching to maturity, were of her own engrafting.

Unluckily, however, this indulgent kind-heartedness rendered her a peculiarly unfit instructress for Ida von Rehfeld. However important the influence of her courtesies and graces of manner on the habits of the lovely, but untaught heiress, her unfeigned admira-

tion of Ida's talents was as ingenious an encouragement to the vanity of her pupil, as the adoration of the old nurse and the reverence of the pastor had been fatal stimulants to her pride. By poor old Vossius, she had been treated as a divinity—by Sara as a queen; and the vassals of her father, to whom she was endeared by many an act of grace in their behalf, surrounded her with professions of subservience. Her pride in herself, however, was rather as the representative of her father, rather as a daughter of the House of Rehfeld, which, as the greatest thing she had ever known, possessed an overweening majesty in her estimation—than as the beautiful and talented Ida. It was such as might progress into ambition, but was scarcely likely to degenerate into any meaner weakness.

Sara, a retainer of the family, had from her earliest hour instilled into her mind notions of its consequence and her own; and even Mademoiselle Thérèse, though in her heart she re-

garded even the court of the Saxon Duchy as purely provincial, and its palace as far inferior to an hotel in the Faubourg St. Germain, had not resided six months at Schloss Rehfeld, before she seemed to coincide in the prejudice of its inmates, that the Baron's daughter had only to be presented at court, to attract the eyes of all Europe towards that thenceforward ennobled nook of the Holy Roman Empire!

The romance of her pupil's position in life, and the peculiarities of her education, were not without their charm in the eyes of one long trammelled by the routine of Parisian life. All was new, strange, and striking to her in that dull old château; and while it became the pastime of her long winter evenings, to recount to the only too attentive Ida, the glories and attractions of her own more brilliant country, she was not sorry to be occasionally relieved from the description of the gay soirées of the Hotel de Choisy, where she

had been spending her last five years, by the solemn episodes with which old Sara performed her part in the gossip of the night; concerning the wars of Germany, the grandeur of its feudal Barons, and above all, the heroism and dignity of the ancestors of the fair girl, who, though released from her authority, still sat patient and attentive by her side.

CHAPTER II.

La chose humaine persiste à trôner ! tant petit que soit le royaume, tant mesquine que soit la couronne, on veut toujours trôner.

CHAMPFORT.

NEARLY two years had elapsed ; and still, the cautious delays of diplomatic negotiation detained Baron von Rehfeld at St. Petersburg.

Had he anticipated so long an absence, his daughter would probably have been his companion. The risks of foreign travel would have been, in fact, far less perilous, than her peculiar position at home. Adulation is always dangerous to the young ; but with its flattering unction unbalanced by rougher lessons, the evil is

incalculable. Ida von Rehfeld was never looked upon unless by admiring eyes, never addressed save by cajoling tongues. She had no companions of her own age, to check her girlish presumption by bantering or reproof, or call forth the better sympathies of her heart by friendship and affection. Her life was a life of superiority over her fellow creatures ; the surest mode of reducing her temper and disposition beneath their level. She might be pardoned for believing that the little circle surrounding her was created solely for her use and profit ; for it professed no other object or purpose. Even in becoming haughty and reckless, the fault was not altogether her own.

There was a broad gravelly parapet beside the fosse flanking the glacis of the old mansion, along which, on the sunny afternoons of spring, the happy girl was permitted to enjoy unmolested exercise ; while Mademoiselle Thérèse indulged in the siesta rendered indispensable

by the unseemly dinner-hour of primitive Germany, or amused herself with the French newspapers, kindly forwarded for her amusement from Petersburg by the Baron. It was *there* that Ida communed with herself. While the breezes sweeping from the forest over the plain, freshened her cheeks and quickened her buoyant steps, the soul within her became equally vivified. The result was that, one fine day, when Mademoiselle Thérèse at length sauntered forth to express her surprise at the untiring activity of her dear child, Ida suddenly burst forth into exclamations almost as startling to the *gouvernante* as if they had proceeded from one of the stone lions rampant, stationed at intervals along the parapet, to support the coat of arms of the house of Rehfeld.

“ My father’s letter this morning gives a splendid account of the gala held for the Emperor’s birthday !”—said she. “ As if I were not sufficiently weary of the life I lead here,

without having it rendered more gloomy by contrast with his brilliant pictures of a courtly existence !”

The governess replied, as it is the province of governesses to reply in such cases, that the time would come when her dear pupil would thank her father for his paternal care in having prolonged the period of her education, and withheld her from all participation in the tumultuous scenes of the world, till she was of an age at once to enjoy and resist their influence.

“ The time *may* come, but it is not yet come !”—cried Ida impetuously. “ I am heart-sick of this place !—I want the sight of new objects—I want the sound of fresh voices !—I am nearly seventeen, and for years I have beheld only peasants and domestics. Till you came hither, *ma bonne*, this sufficed me. My poor, good Sara, and the kind Herr Pastor, satisfied my desires of affection and companionship. But you have given me a taste for

better things. All you have told me of France, of the brilliant society of Paris, of the life led universally by the women of your own country, have so excited my interest, that I am getting impatient of this cold featureless place. Look!" said she, suddenly pausing. "For nearly seventeen years, I have had no object to gaze at but yonder spire, peeping through the trees, and the sweep of woods beyond, cresting the line of hills."

"A charming landscape!" muttered Made-moiselle Thérèse, from whose spontaneous ejaculations of disgust, at her first arrival, the Fraulein probably derived her first consciousness of the tediousness of the place.

"But what does it say to the heart to attach or elevate?" cried Ida. "Nothing! Had my poor mother lived, or had I possessed a young sister to grow up with me here, the charm of early associations would have endeared every object around us. But my home has been cheerless; and my father ought to reflect

upon this when he describes to me, in such glowing colours, the brilliant festivities of St. Petersburg, in which he well knows I am now of an age to participate."

Mademoiselle was a little shocked, a little alarmed. This sudden assumption of independence of opinion on the part of her pupil led her to regret having so freely amused Mademoiselle de Rehfeld's insipid leisure with accounts of the gay entertainments she had witnessed in the establishment of the Countess de Choisy, of whose daughter she had been the preceptress. All she could now do, however, in justice to her employer, was to enter into a defence of the policy of Monsieur le Baron ; secretly resolving to write and acquaint him of the impatience his lovely Ida was betraying for the moment of restoration to his society, and inauguration into that of the great world.

But that her pupil was a protestant, Mademoiselle Thérèse would have adopted the more

expedient course of appealing to her Director. But she was too well aware of the prolixities of the worthy Vossius, to engage his aid in reproving this efflorescence of youthful vanity, in their common charge. She did not suppose that the tedium of Schloss Rehfeld was likely to be diminished, in Ida's estimation, by a daily sermon from the pastor.

Meanwhile, the impatience of the dawning beauty did not tend to soften the hauteur of her character. Her manner became absent and unconciliating; and every fresh despatch that brought an account of the diversions in which her father bore a part, served to augment her dissatisfaction.

"The Emperor, you see, opened the ball given by the Grand Duchess Helena with the daughter of the French ambassador!" said she. "Had I been with my father, *chère bonne*, I should have shared the honours and pleasures of the evening."

"But the crowd, the display, the distrac-

tion of such a scene, my poor child!" remonstrated Sara, who happened to be present; "you would have been terrified to death!"

"Why more terrified than the daughter of Count St. Guillaume?" demanded Ida. "My father seems determined to unfit my timidity and awkwardness for a share in such scenes, by the utter solitude to which I am condemned. Yet so far from feeling alarmed, *chère bonne*, at the prospect of ever going into a world of fêtes and representation, like that you have described in such flowing colours, I feel, on the contrary, that life would be doubly worth living, in such an atmosphere.—I was not created for companionship with streams and forests. I want friends to talk to—acquaintance to talk of. I want all you have described to me, as constituting the charm of the Hôtel de Choisy."

Again did poor Mademoiselle Thérèse wish she had been less communicative. It is true that, during those weary evenings at

Rehfeld, she had recurred to her former life more for the diversion of her own *ennui*, by retrospection, than for the recreation or instruction of Ida; and so absorbed had she allowed herself to become in her descriptions of the gay *coteries* and elegant publicity of Parisian life, that she had failed to notice the glistening of her pupil's eyes, or the ardent interest excited by her portraits of the chivalrous youths of France, and the beauties to whose service they were devoted.

“Be satisfied, dearest Ida!” was all she could now falter in palliation of the mischief. “In two more months, you will be seventeen, and your father has assured us that he shall be here for the hunting season. You will then assume your place at the head of his establishment; and whether he return to his diplomatic duties at St. Petersburg, or settle altogether at the Residenz, you must become his companion, and the sharer of his pleasures. If Sara is to be believed, it is the Baron von

Rehfeld's intention to unite you, in the course of next year, with your cousin Wilhelm, one of the most amiable young men at the court of ——; who, at your father's death, will inherit his title and fiefs."

"Which is precisely the cause of all my anxiety!" interrupted Ida. "Except for that horrible prospect, I could bear with this place. But the idea of spending my whole future life here! I am well acquainted with my cousin Wilhelm. When I was a child, he used to accompany his father hither, to the hunting parties. A well-meaning uninteresting cousin, as you can well imagine;—a person who will be content to sit down in dull obscurity, to live and die at Rehfeld!"

"But you cannot suppose, my dear child, that a father, so indulgent as yours, will impose any match upon you, really distasteful?" remonstrated Mademoiselle Thérèse. "You have unlimited influence over Monsieur le Baron. He absolutely adores you;—(who

does *not* ?) and the moment he cedes to you the control of his household, as he has announced his intention of doing on your ensuing birthday, you will become his companion and friend. Your wishes will be his law. Nay, I have my suspicions that you have only to hint it is the dearest wish of your heart to visit Paris, to determine him to undertake the journey."

"Pray heaven your prognostications may be fulfilled," cried Ida, more cheerfully; and from that day, the reveries of the young girl became brightened by notions of her impending consequence as Lady paramount of Schloss Rehfeld, and wild visions of the brilliant pleasures of a still more extended sphere. But that her whole soul was self-engrossed, she must have noticed at that period a singular alteration in the style of her father's letters. The Baron, who for some time past had tried to amuse her with detailed accounts of the pleasures of society, was gradually becoming

as dry and concise, as when his epistles consisted of exhortations to be diligent in her studies, and affectionate to Sara, her second mother, and Mademoiselle Thérèse Moreau. Nay, they evinced a sort of half-repressed uneasiness, precursive as it were of misfortune to him, or herself. Allusions, which she did not trouble herself to decypher, darkened his style and announced his increasing infirmity of spirits. The only thing to which poor Ida really gave her attention was that the days were rapidly passing away, the expiration of which was to bring him back to his native country. At the commencement of September, the Baron was to reach the Residenz ; and after a few days' sojourn there for the discharge of his duties to the Prince, he was to repair to Schloss Rehfeld, and give the signal of her enfranchisement from girlish subjection.

Already, the steward had received orders to prepare for the reception of a large and bril-

liant party, which was to accompany the Herr Baron ; and difficult were it to decide *which* was the more rejoiced at the prospect of seeing the old fashioned suite of state apartments once more blazing with lights, and resounding with hospitality—Mademoiselle Thérèse, or her pupil. Liberal means were habitually assigned by the Baron, to procure for his daughter all that the progress of her education, or that girlish vanity seemed to require. But now, a succession of cases arrived from the Residenz, bringing new furniture, new books, new musical instruments, evidently intended for her use ; besides a charming variety of dresses and trinkets, inscribed with her name.

Ida was now the happiest of the happy ! Her dreams were at length on the eve of realization. Her life seemed only now beginning. A thousand times a day did she embrace old Sara, or call upon Mademoiselle Thérèse to sympathize in her joy ; nor was the gouvernante ever weary of admiring the loveliness of

her charge, arrayed for the first time, in the gay attire of modern fashion. Mademoiselle von Rehfeld was beginning to rehearse the graces of the courteous hostess ; and her instructress, to assure her that she would do the honours of the castle, in a style certain at once to gratify her father, and enchant his noble guests.

As the lovely Ida paraded the picture gallery and saloon, which, thanks to her father's recent liberality had begun to assume something of the tone described by Mademoiselle as characteristic of a "*salon comme il faut*," she foresaw the moment when it would be filled with an admiring circle, every eye of which was centred upon the youthful heiress, the cynosure of the festive scene.

On the day fixed for the Baron's arrival, a glowing September sun burnished the towers of the old mansion ; and even the well-trimmed evergreens of the terrace seemed trying to look bright and lively in honour of the event.

In the court yard, was an old fashioned fountain, recently placed in repair, in order that its puny jet might accredit so great an event in the annals of the Baronial family, as the return of a Rehfeld from a diplomatic mission on the icy shores of the Neva ; and scattered about the place, were a score or two of villagers in their best array, their button-holes adorned with knots of ribbons or posies of China asters ; who, marshalled under the auspices of poor Vossius, were to sally forth to the extremity of the avenue, to greet their honourable patron with a concatenation of discordant sounds, forming the Sunday orchestra of the singing loft of Rehfeld.

The morning progressed ; and Ida, restless and excited, kept wandering from window to window, on the look out for a train of carriages ; now, changing the arrangement of the vast bouquets with which the providence of the steward had disfigured the jasper vases in the old library, and the recently received ornaments

of Dresden china in the saloon; when at length, her ear was startled by the smacking of a courier's whip, and the jingling of his bells. —The cavalcade must be at hand!

He came, however, only to announce that the Herr Baron and his noble company would still be two hours on the road; and to deliver to the hands of the Fraulein, a despatch from her father.

Already, Mademoiselle Thérèse had eagerly rushed forth and circulated through the establishment tidings that they had two hours' respite from their duties; when lo! on her return to the saloon, she found the lovely girl she had left so blooming and joyous, speechless and almost ghastly with consternation! Terrible news had evidently been conveyed by her father's letter. The gouvernante almost trembled to hazard an interrogation.

While she was still sitting beside her charge, holding her hand in hers, and suggesting eau de fleur d'orange, and other restoratives,

which she might as well have administered unasked, the door was flung open, and old Sara, tottering into the room with a visage still more overcome than that of her young lady, made her appearance.

“ My child—my poor child !”—was all she could utter, as she knelt down before Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, weeping upon the fair hands she pressed to her withered lips.

“ What on earth is the meaning of all this !” murmured the astonished gouvernante. “ Speak Sara—speak !”

“ It means,” answered the sobbing woman, rising from her knees, “ that we have been shamefully deceived. Rehfeld has got a new lady—the Baron a new wife. Do you hear the huzzaing in the court yard ? The courier has just circulated the news, and those ungrateful people are hailing it as a matter of joy !”

“ Married ?”—reiterated Mademoiselle Thérèse, turning as pale as her natural copper colour would allow.

“ Married !—All these toys and gimcracks,” continued Sara, pointing round at the new furniture, “ were intended only to welcome the new Baroness. Shameful—shameful !”

“ It is certainly somewhat singular that the Baron von Rehfeld should so little have understood what was due to us,” replied Mademoiselle Thérèse, drawing up, “ as to defer till the eleventh hour, the signification of an event that must have been long in contemplation.”

“ Long in contemplation, perhaps,” murmured Ida, striving to rally her spirits, “ but hurried, he assures me, by unexpected circumstances at the moment of his departure. It had been settled that the marriage should not take place till my father’s return to Russia ; and he intended to break it to me in person with a thousand necessary explanations, during his sojourn at Rehfeld. But at the instant of quitting St. Petersburg, the family of—the Baroness—pressed the fulfilment of his engagements. The wedding was a hasty one,

and it was of course necessary that he should be the first to disclose the fact to the Grand Duke."

The commentary of Mademoiselle Thérèse upon all this, was an expressive shrug of the shoulders; but the less polished old Sara, who still looked upon the Herr Baron, at nearly fifty years of age, as her nursling, imposed very little restraint upon her exclamations of indignation and disgust.

"A second marriage!—a marriage, after a widowhood of seventeen years!—a marriage with a foreigner!—perhaps with a heretic!—There was no excuse or apology for the Herr Baron."

Even his own faithful nurse disinherited him, from that moment, of her affections.

CHAPTER III.

My father's wife, yet not my mother!—No,
Worlds, *worlds* less than a mother! Filial Duty
That hath the part to play of filial Love,
Assumes a task outweighing that of Atlas,
When doomed to bear our pondrous globe a-poize.
Yet must I honour her,—ay, *must*!

FLETCHER.

IN certain emergencies, and failing a better monitor, pride is sometimes a lucky ascendant over the human mind. Grieved as she was, Ida would not allow even those so true to her, to perceive that she thought herself aggrieved. Still less would she permit the stranger about to wrest her sceptre from her hand, to discover that her abdication was compulsory.

Before the arrival of the bridal party, accordingly, she had recovered her courage so far as to receive them with dignity and grace, nay, with a suitable welcome ; and it is more than probable that, but for the event which had excited her feelings to so wild a pitch, her deportment as lady of the ascendant at Schloss Rehfeld, would have been far less gracious, than as the humbled step-daughter of a stranger.

She now placed a sort of perversity in appearing to the greatest advantage ; resolved that the noble guests of her father should admit her to be fully qualified for presiding over the establishment, which he had chosen to place under the control of an alien ; and her youthful beauty became almost painfully dazzling under the excitement of the feelings that swelled her heart to bursting, while her face was radiant with smiles.

Of the age or country of the new Baroness, her father had said nothing ; and the young

girl, naturally connecting the idea of a bride with youth and beauty, expected to find a young and lovely creature hanging on the arm of him whose grave countenance and grey hairs she had been accustomed to venerate, and in whom her trust was already diminished.

At length, there resounded at a distance the discharge of petards prepared by the tenants, as usual on such occasions, to frighten the horses of the travellers upon their arrival on the confines of the estate. Then came the sound of bells jangling from the village tower of Rehfeld, and finally, the clatter of horses, and rumble of wheels ; whereupon, pressing her hands almost convulsively on her heart, as if to subdue its pulsations, Ida rose from the seat into which she had sunk on the first of these intimations of the approach of the travellers ; and, motioning to Mademoiselle Thérèse not to accompany her too closely, proceeded into the great hall.

The bride and bridegroom had already alighted from their travelling carriage, and were just entering the house. The bride and bridegroom! —What a sound to reach the ears of poor Ida! Her eyes, however, were at that moment too eagerly occupied, to allow much leisure for her other faculties; although the tears which she could not altogether succeed in chiding back to their fountain head, formed some obstacle to her task of observation.

Nature prompted her to rush forward, and fling herself as usual into the arms of her father. But Ida was beginning to mistrust the suggestions of nature; and consulting only her pride, stopped short in the middle of the hall, and waited till the Baron, placing a hand in her own, exclaimed in a broken voice—"My dearest child! embrace your new mother."

Mademoiselle von Rehfeld's ideas of an embrace being purely German, she was about to extend her arms towards the lady, whose form and features she was now weeping too much in

earnest, to discern. But her movements were checked by a formal salutation imprinted on either of her cheeks by the Baroness ; and her ears startled by a voice addressing her in French as purely Parisian as that of Mademoiselle Thérèse !

“ Conduct us into the saloon, my dear Ida,” said her father, perceiving that more eyes were upon them than he was desirous should pry into their family secrets ;—and the moment they had crossed the threshold of the drawing-room, the Baron turning towards a group by which they were closely followed, began renewing his expressions of welcome to the foreign visitors, who appeared to have misunderstood the object of his movement.

“ Where is my daughter—I am all eagerness to introduce my daughter to her new sister !” cried the Baroness :—at which startling exclamation, Ida for the first time bent her gaze steadily upon the bride, and saw with amazement, that the lady whom the dimness of the

old hall, and a certain air of elegance and distinction had invested with the charms of youth, was really old enough to be her mother.

This discovery became confirmed when the daughter so earnestly summoned, made her tardy appearance; and if poor Ida had for a moment flattered herself that the mother-in-law unexpectedly forced upon her endurance, would form no rival to her pretensions to the name of the 'Lily of Rehfeld,' by which she was known in the environs, the striking beauty of her father's step-daughter was of a nature to invade her rights even to that treasured supremacy.

"Marguerite! I commend you to the protection and kindness of Mademoiselle von Rehfeld," said the Baroness, addressing a young lady whom Ida justly estimated to be nearly of her own age; and the silent formality with which "Marguerite" curtsied in obedience to the exhortation, afforded a somewhat alarm-

ing sample of the respect and obedience exacted by the new Baroness.

No further explanations were given. The Baroness, fatigued by her journey and the noisy demonstrations of the tenantry in her honour, threw herself into a corner of the sofa, completely exhausted, but completely at home ; and such of the party as were not engaged with the Baron at the further end of the room, surveying the prospect from its embayed windows, or admiring the courtesy of his greeting to Mademoiselle Thérèse, now hastened towards Madame von Rehfeld, with inquiries and condolences touching the contraierties of the day.

Involuntarily, Ida took her place in the nearest chair, her hands deathly cold, her ears burning, her respiration impeded. It was the first time she had found herself a secondary personage in that room. Into what depths of insignificance might she not be about to fall!

She took no note of the movements of the Baroness's daughter ; who, after pausing a moment, as if waiting for a formal invitation to be seated, assumed a chair by her side. No one took the slightest notice of either of them. One half the party was engaged in conversation with the Baroness, while the Baron attempted to engage himself in conversation with the other.

After the first hurried moments of conversation, Ida summoned courage to examine the individuals composing the two groups, who had been slightly named to her by her father on entering the room, but whom she found herself unable to individualize.

Now that the feelings of despair by which she was overcome, had dried the tears in her eyes, she perceived that one of the two strangers stationed beside Madame von Rehfeld, was young and good looking ; while the other, a man of maturer years, if less handsome, was remarkable for the distinction of his manners

and appearance. They were conversing together in French, which appeared to be the native language of the Baroness; and Ida could not but admit that these stranger guests, however unwelcome to her at that moment, displayed higher graces of manner and deportment than her experience of the former autumnal festivities of Schloss Rehfeld had brought under her notice.

Towards the group surrounding her father, the sounds of whose loud and joyous conversation in German, reached her where she sat, Ida scarcely ventured to extend her scrutiny. Filial instinct rendered it painful to her at that moment to fix her eyes upon her father; from whom, for the first time in her life, her heart and soul were estranged. A familiar voice, however, suddenly attracted her notice; and looking towards the recessed window, she observed poor Mademoiselle Thérèse expending her civilities on her young cousin Wilhelm von Rehfeld, whose vague and ceremonious replies

afforded evidence that his attention was reluctantly given. What could be more natural than that Ida should suppose her cousin anxious to escape from the hands of her gouvernante, only to pay his compliments to herself?

It was more than a year since they had met; and for many preceding, the young heir of the fiefs of the house of Rehfeld, when visiting the castle annually with his uncle, was accustomed to devote to his lovely cousin the attentions due to cousinship so fair, and calculated to mark his cognizance of the projects entertained by the Baron in his favour; and Ida, who, from the moment a surmise of these had entered her head, had become less girlishly cordial in her reception of the future bridegroom, felt that she should now derive solace and importance from his devotion. She was almost angry with Mademoiselle Thérèse for detaining the only member of the party to whom she was an object of solicitude; more particularly as the young Baron's wandering

and unquiet glances seemed to indicate no little anxiety to be released.

At the close of ten minutes, however, Mademoiselle Thérèse's inquiries of her new acquaintance touching the state of the roads, the news of the Residenz, the health of the Grand Duke, and the success of the last opera, being exhausted, the Baron was at liberty to move; and move he instantly did, proceeding straight towards the end of the room, where his lovely cousin was performing her penance of insignificance.

The moment Ida became conscious that her cousin was on his road towards her chair, with the instinctive coquetry of her sex, she averted her eyes. At length, finding that no Wilhelm addressed her, she hazarded an inquiring glance around her; and found him—after the due performance of his three bows of ceremony, and causing the heel of his boots to resound like castanets, according to the rules of Saxon politeness—commencing a formal con-

versation with the daughter of the Baroness.

The emotions that assailed her at the discovery, were probably much such as agitated the feelings of James II, when, on hearing that even the stupid Prince George of Denmark had deserted him for the reforming party, he exclaimed, "So—poor '*est-il-possible*,' is gone with the rest!" Still, she was mortified by the secession of even the last and least of those on whom she had for some weeks past been reckoning, as the devoted slaves of her footstool.

But if the girlish mortification of Ida on this head arose from any suspicion of confederacy between "Marguerite" and the young Baron, she must have been quickly re-assured by the cold propriety with which the stranger replied to the courtesies of her new acquaintance. Impossible to be more formal in her deportment, or more laconic in her replies. A greater contrast could scarcely

be conceived than between the frank loquacity of the Baroness, and the mournful taciturnity of her daughter.

The day was luckily declining, and the dinner-hour sufficiently near at hand to warrant the retirement of all parties to their rooms, for the duties of the toilet. It was a considerable relief to Ida, when her father and the old steward undertook the duty of marshalling the lady of Schloss Rehfeld to the state chamber, which had been prepared for the most illustrious of the expected guests, very little surmising that it was about to be appropriated to the reception of a new Baroness von Rehfeld.

Hurrying to her own room, without further interest in the hospitalities of the house, Ida threw herself on the bed and burst into an agony of tears. Her humiliation was complete. Her better and worse feelings were alike wounded; her filial love, her selfish pride, her vain ambition, her girlish coquetry; and in

proportion as the future she had projected disappeared from view, the past, which she had hitherto regarded so scornfully, assumed due value in her eyes.

Degraded as she was by the recent event, what would she not have given to have returned to her condition of former times; to have become only as the Ida von Rehfeld of the preceding day? What would she not have given, even to be clasped to the heart of the father whose coming she had hailed but as the signal of her rescue from a life of obscurity, or to have been comforted by the assiduities of the kinsman whom she had accustomed herself to despise as a boor!

But it was too late! Her destinies were not to choose. Little as she had been consulted in their ordering, the decree was irrevocable. Henceforward, she was to be the neglected or oppressed step-daughter of an insolent foreigner!—

Young as she was, she had been struck by the

worldly ceremoniousness of deportment between her father and his bride. There was evidently nothing tender, nothing intimate between them ; and though her first apprehension, on learning his hasty marriage, had been to see a young and charming woman in his arms, to the utter absorption of his affections, she now felt that she should have been more at ease had indications of personal attachment afforded an excuse for his marriage.

On raising her head from her pillow, after some minutes' indulgence in these bitter reflections, she was comforted by the sight of the *gouvernante* watching over her with a tearful countenance. It was the first time *Ida* had ever seen the good hearted woman weep.

"Spare me, I entreat," faltered she, as *Mademoiselle Thérèse* folding her in her arms, again melted into tears. "I would not, for worlds, that these people discovered the extent of my grief and mortification! If you love me, refrain from aught that may disarm my courage."

And starting up, Ida began, with trembling hands and wild and flurried manner, to commence her toilet.

At that moment, old Sara, who had been engaged with the chief domestics of the household in doing the honours of the castle to the Baroness and her suite, bustled into the room with angry eyes, and a voice hoarse with emotion.

“ I call it an outrage !” cried the indignant nurse, “ a downright outrage !—To bring down such multitudes of people upon us—and at such a moment !”

“ Rather thank heaven my father did not come alone with his new family,” faltered Ida, her anger subdued by the rage of another. “ The presence of these strangers imposes, at least, some restraint on our feelings.”

“ A foreigner, too—a widow—a woman encumbered with children of her own !”

“ Dear, good nurse !” remonstrated Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, “ remember that, only

two hours ago, your chief anxiety arose from the probability of a young wife and future offspring !”

“ Any thing rather than this haughty cold-blooded woman !” cried the irate Sara. “ When the Baron, my dear son, presented me to her notice and explained my position in his family, the stranger noticed me, only by a bow such as a queen might have given from a throne. But she will soon find her French manner make no way for her, in our simple, cordial Germany !”

“ Her *French* manner ?” reiterated Made-moiselle Thérèse ; who, to dispense with the presence of Ida’s attendant, had undertaken her duties of the day. “ Trust me, there is nothing French in such hauteur as you describe ! A *grande dame de Paris* is the most affable creature in the world.”

“ A further proof then, that, though a Parisian, she has never been a great lady before,” retorted the angry nurse.

“ But she is *not* a Parisian, my good Sara !” remonstrated Mademoiselle Thérèse, who was now busied in selecting, from among the dresses lately forwarded by the Baron to his daughter, the most costly she could find, that her pupil might do the greatest honour to herself and the occasion. “ The Baron’s letter this morning, (you were present when this dear child read it aloud to me,) expressly spoke of his marriage with the Countess Erloff. The family of Erloff, my good Sara, is Russian, decidedly Russian !”

“ But the Baroness, if you remember, was a widow,” said Ida gently.

“ True, my dear child, true !—And you say then,” continued she, turning towards the nurse who was still chafing at her contradiction, “ that she is by birth a countrywoman of mine ?”

“ Proud as Lucifer, as she is,” retorted the nurse, “ perhaps *she* might not thank either of us for such an expression. If you mean, how-

ever, that the Baroness von Rehfeld is French by birth—French she certainly is! I heard as much from her own valet-de-chambre, who has already announced, in presence of Johann—old Johann, a faithful servitor of this dear child's grandsire, that in future he is to be seneschal at Rehfeld."

"My father may purpose the retirement of Johann," interposed Ida, forgetting for a moment her own grievances; "on account of his age and infirmities, but only to secure him a happy retirement from his duties. Trust to the justice of my father."

"It matters not!" cried the nurse, fractiously; "neither Johann, nor any other of the household, I presume, would under any circumstances be mean-spirited enough to remain here, under the domination of a foreigner!"

"Still, my good Sara," remonstrated Thérèse, whose views of the case were wholly altered, by the recent announcement, "still, since this lady is not, as we had all surmised,

a Russian—a savage Muscovite—since she is by birth, and probably education, courteous and enlightened——”

“ I know nothing, good sooth, about courteous or enlightened !” cried the old woman. “ Those who are not German born, are alike aliens to *me*. Saving for love-service, I have no need of service at all ; and love-service, even were she my countrywoman, towards one who comes to dislodge my poor child here from her rightful station in her rightful home, is out of the question. The best farewell I can take of Schloss Rehfeld is the speediest !”

“ But your poor child ?” faltered Ida, turning round from the hands that were anxiously adorning her ; “ surely you would not abandon me, only because others more bound to befriend me, have done me wrong ?”

“ Abandon *thee* ?—no !” exclaimed the poor woman, brought to her senses by this rebuke, “ rather follow thee to the world’s end, whithersoever thou goest.”

And but for the remonstrances of the gouvernante, that the dinner bell was about to sound, and that for their darling charge to appear at table, either carelessly attired or with her face distorted by weeping, was anything but expedient, the embraces of the subdued old creature and her nursling's nursling, would have been prolonged beyond all reason.

“And now I think of it,” said Sara, recalled by her own tears to a milder mood, “the Baron bad me tell thee, dearest child, that, howbeit his duties of ceremony to his guests, (he said no word, good man, of his old bride!) were too imperative to permit his seeing thee alone, it might be until to-morrow, he intreated thee to believe, that his heart was not the less with thee; and to comfort thyself as one abiding under the roof of a father to whom she is the dearest thing on earth.”

“I am satisfied!” said Ida, wiping away her tears, and resuming her courage; “I am perfectly satisfied. I was, indeed, afraid he had forgotten me.”

“Thou shouldst have made allowance for the hurry and agitation of such a moment,” said Sara, taking the part of her son and master, the moment he appeared to be accused.

“The more pity,” hinted Mademoiselle Thérèse, glad of an opportunity to retort upon her previous ungraciousness, “that he could not precede his gay associates by a day or two, so as to preserve this painful family meeting from publicity.”

“It seems to me,” murmured Ida, shrugging her shoulders, “that it had been far worse to bear, in the privacy of our domestic fireside. My father’s wife will *now* want leisure to examine my feelings, or criticise my conduct. No! since this misfortune was decreed, I am glad the shock has been sudden, and the inauguration of the new people an affair of state. They seem to arrive here at Rehfeld, only like guests. Better so!—Accident has been kinder to me than my father.”

The toilet of Mademoiselle Rehfeld being

now completed, and the time expired admitting of her absence from the party, the exclamations of her two adoring companions afforded to her youthful vanity, the incense to which it was only too well accustomed; and so vehemently did they assure her, she was all loveliness—all perfection, that the magnificent dress, and costly ornaments, recently bestowed by her father, seemed to have redoubled the usual measure of her charms.

Reliant on this soothing adulation, for no countercheck of disapproval had ever reached her ear, the bosom of the young beauty heaved with emotions of gratified pride, and the mantling blood fixed a permanent blush upon her cheek. It was no flattery, at least on the part of her two injudicious friends, to assert that never had she looked more lovely.

Of all the vanities that beset the female heart, that of conscious beauty is the most excitable and influential; and Ida, as she descended the grand stair-case, and was about to

re-enter the circle of strangers she had quitted in disgust, felt almost happy in the re-assurance of her personal pre-eminence over the rivals in authority bestowed upon her by her father.

That the younger and more dangerous—that Marguerite — that Mademoiselle Erloff—(for so she had been recently named by Sara,) formed any pretension to eclipse the young heiress of Schloss Rehfeld, was disproved in the eyes of Ida, on entering the saloon, by the timidity with which she sat concealed behind her mother's fauteuil, and the simplicity of a costume consisting in her own dark braided hair, and a dress of white muslin of the plainest form. In the course of the evening, however, her opinions on this point were fated to undergo some modification.

The dinner, though served with splendour, dragged dull and heavily through its Silesian multitude of courses. Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, seated besides her cousin at a distance from either her father or the Baroness, was lost

in abstraction, and all around her seemed passing in the phantasmagorical showing of a dream ; till the moment when, coffee having been served at table, according to the custom of most continental countries, the whole party rose to quit the dinner-room together.

With absent listlessness, Ida took the arm of the young Baron to follow the new lady of the castle, who was leaning on that of Prince Galitzin, the elder of the two guests who had been presented to her before dinner; and Made-moiselle Erloff, whose cavalier was Count Alfred de Vaudreuil, the youngest and noisiest of the party ; when, as they were traversing the picture gallery in procession, on their return to the now illuminated saloon, the Baroness paused till Ida came up with her, evidently as a matter of courtesy.

Dismissing the two gentlemen with a nod as omnipotent as that of Juno, she took the arm of her step-daughter ; while the Prince sauntered towards the billiard-room adjoining the

gallery, and Ida stood transfixed by her coolness.

“These are highly interesting family portraits!” said she, raising her glass towards one which, instead of representing, like the majority of the pictures, the grim and gaunt ancestors of the house of Rehfeld, exhibited a Franciscan monk in the agonies of penitence, a frightful copy of one of the painful originals of Spagnoletto. “I must examine them more at leisure. Native artists, I presume? Again, new acquaintances to make! for I confess, that, with the exception of Holbein, Durer, and Cranach, (whose works I do not recognise here,) I am miserably unfamiliar with the masters of the German school. On many such points, I have my education to make; but I shall prove a docile, if not an apt scholar.”

“Family portraits,” observed Ida, coldly, “especially when not of first rate merit, are rarely interesting, unless to those of kindred blood.”

“Or to those in whom intermarriage may have awoke kindred feelings,” replied the Baroness, not choosing to perceive that offence was intended. “By the way, my dear child, I am meditating my first quarrel with your father, and on your account.”

Startled by the deliberate sang-froid of the woman of the world, Ida had not courage for the interrogation she saw was expected of her.

“The Baron would not allow me,” she pursued, “to bring with me for your use, a few of the *chiffons* which the remoteness of this place from any capital, might, I thought, render acceptable. He assured me that he was in the habit of sending you everything that money could procure, for your pleasure or adornment. How could I suppose the dear Baron had profited so little by his recent experience at our gay court of St. Petersburg; which, next to Paris, or perhaps because supplied from Paris, prides itself upon being the best dressed

in Europe, as to have disfigured you with things five years out of date, and even when new, adapted only for an old woman like myself!—But men, even the cleverest, are little to be trusted in such matters. They have no taste for the fitness of things. They conceive that half the merit of dress consists in its cost; whereas the greatest distinction of toilet, in a young person, is to have the air of costing nothing.”

Ida, to whom this sally had very much that of an economical exhortation, replied coldly and briefly, that there was every excuse for the Baron's prodigality in favour of an only daughter.

“For his prodigality, certainly—if it existed, of which I see no evidence; but not, my dear child, for his bad taste. Were you to appear in your present style of dress in one of our gay ball-rooms, either French or Russian, you would pass for a chaperon. No one could possibly imagine that an unmarried girl so far underrated her

potent charms of youth and beauty, as thus to overload herself with ornaments !”

Ida felt that she was blushing—if not with shame—with anger, at this covert reproof.

“ But it is all the fault of the Baron !” resumed the imperturbed step-mother ; and her embarrassed companion was almost persuaded that an affectionate pressure of the arm enforced the assurance. “ No man—but why belabour with a heavy sermon so light a subject ? Tell me, my dear child ! what is the order of the evening ? How do you amuse your visitors at Rehfeld ? What have we to offer these people to-night ?”

They were now emerging into the brilliantly lighted saloon, and by way of answer, Ida glanced towards the magnificent piano, with which her father had lately presented her.

“ Out of tune, I conclude,” said the Baroness, replying to her look, “ like every piano in every country house !”

“ On the contrary,” Ida was beginning, “ only yesterday—”

“ Ah, so much the better,” cried the Baroness, interpreting her meaning. “ What new music have you ? Not a word of Strauss, Lanner or Labitsky, I entreat, for we have had nothing else at St. Petersburg the whole winter ; and to say the truth, our gentlemen, I suspect, are no very ardent musicians ; unless in a box at the Italian opera—no matter where. You will notice, some day or other, my dear Ida, that the corps diplomatique of every country in Europe, is religiously devoted to *les Bouffes*, at once as a matter of good taste and *bon ton*. But I was inquiring what we had before us for to-night ?—Whist of course !—the Prince must have his whist—*sans le whist, pas de salut !* But for *you* children, could you not manage some *petits jeux* ? If not, Marguerite can put you in the way. We may, perhaps, arrange charades or tableaux for another night ; meantime, do let us have *something*.”

The restlessness of the *grande dame* to whom it was impossible to pass an evening without

some sort of effort to entertain her, appeared to poor Ida little short of disease; still, she felt, as before, that all this stir and bustle was preferable to the stillness of domestic life. She trusted that the ceremony of her dethronement would thus pass unobserved by their guests from the Residenz.

Moreover, she soon perceived that Madame von Rehfeld, though ostensibly consulting her about these and similar matters, and continually summoning her step-daughter to her side and detaining her by gestures the most endearing, disposed every thing exclusively in her own way. She was one of those women, who, without any decided superiority of beauty or wit, know so well to turn to account the share they possess, and so self-assertingly take possession of every thing and every body falling in their way, that it seems impossible, even to stronger minds, to dispute their ascendancy.

She contrived accordingly that the Baron

should require from his daughter as an exhibition of her musical powers, a symphony of half an hour's duration, such as demanded the utmost force of amateurship to support without a yawn; after which, Marguerite was ordered to the piano forte, in order that a few simple notes of one of Schubert's exquisite ballads, should render the laborious effort of the preceding exhibition still more apparent. No sooner was the pure sweet voice of Mademoiselle Erloff audible, than the murmur of conversation became hushed. The men, scattered through different parts of the saloon, drew nearer to the instrument. Even Mademoiselle Thérèse, who had been conversing with the young kinsman of her patron, at some distance from the rest of the party, was unconsciously attracted towards the gentle musician.

The only person not manifestly enchanted with the performance of Mademoiselle Erloff, was herself. At the close of her song, Marguerite rose from the piano with tremulous

limbs and a flushed cheek, overcome by emotion and timidity ; afraid of her mother's condemnation, yet still more afraid of the general applause that greeted her performance ; and Ida, jealous, almost envious of her success, felt ashamed in her turn, on recognizing the innate and most genuine diffidence of the girl whom she had been prepared to find exult in her superiority of accomplishment.

“ Marguerite has neither your knowledge of music nor your powers of execution, my dear child,” said the Baroness, soothingly to her step-daughter, on noticing Mademoiselle von Rehfeld's crest-fallen countenance. “ She is so fond of painting, that to music she has given less time than I could desire. You must encourage her, my dear Ida, and, in time, perhaps, she may do something. I have always fancied that the very air of Germany must confer musical taste and feeling. Marguerite will perhaps acquire here the zeal that was wanting at Petersburg.”

On turning round at the close of a compliment which Ida secretly regarded as the praise undeserved which is "scandal in disguise," she found her young rival established in friendly conversation with Mademoiselle Thérèse. There was now a theme of common interest between them. The accomplishments of the young girl and the appreciation of the governess, brought about a speedy intimacy; and Ida was startled to perceive that the stiff formal and apparently disdainful damsel who had been seated beside her, required only encouragement and sympathy to brighten her countenance with expression, and soften her manners into courtesy and grace.

Mademoiselle von Rehfeld was now thoroughly dispirited. A glance round that gay saloon, filled with strangers to whom she was comparatively an object of indifference, who were conversing in a foreign tongue with which its antique walls were unfamiliar, and who, in their courtliness of habits and manners, pro-

bably regarded its simplicity as barbarous and herself as an awkward little German *mädchen*, only a few degrees more polished and refined than her father's tenants, reduced her to insignificance. . She became conscious that her dreams of girlhood had been too aspiring. All the self-sufficiency engendered by her life of solitary predominance, was crumbling away. Her father had deserted her. Even her good governess seemed on the eve of deserting to the enemy's camp; and that night, when the haughty heiress of Rehfeld retired to the chamber hitherto brightened by indistinct visions of future glory, she was reduced to a state of misery and mortification, which it required more than all the wisdom inculcated by the lessons of Herr Vossius, to meet without an agony of tears!—

CHAPTER IV.

Il faut qu'une longue souffrance éclaire notre esprit,
Pour deviner l'orage sur un ciel qui sourit.

BERTIN.

THAT night was one of watchfulness and meditation to Ida—the first in her life she had ever found sleepless ! Young as she was, she saw that much of her future happiness depended upon the mode in which she encountered the present crisis of her destinies.

On such advisers as her prejudiced old nurse and inconsistent governess, she had little reliance ; while the poor pastor was too completely devoted to his patron to hazard a word of available counsel. Already Mademoi-

selle von Rehfeld mistrusted nearly as much as she disliked her; and all she had ever read in story or heard in legend of the cruel persecutions of step-mothers, recurred to her recollection. She entertained little doubt that the intruder would leave no means untried to estrange her father's affections, and gradually reduce her to subservience and despair. Happily, she was on her guard. She would fortify herself against the enemy within such ramparts of reserve, and conceal her troubles and fears under such an armour of coldness, that the *intrigante*, her terrible domestic foe, would be kept at bay.

She resolved, in short, as most people do who determine upon playing a part contrary to the suggestion of their natures, to render herself as disagreeable as possible. But though veteran diplomatists may sit in their cabinets and devise plans of policy, it is not so easy for a girl of seventeen to adopt an independent

line of conduct. A girl of seventeen is not only the slave of others, but of herself ; of her own gay impulses of nature, her own joyousness of heart. At the close of a few days, Ida von Rehfeld, forced, for the first time in her life, to submit to the influence of an authority, tacitly exercised, indeed, but not the less potent, found herself carried away by the force of circumstances, and forced to do as she was done by.

The well-drilled household which accompanied the bridal party to Rehfeld, had taken possession of the place, as of a conquered country ; calling into existence a new order of things, of which it was impossible to deny the superiority over the antecedents of the family. The dull, old-fashioned place was growing almost cheerful ; and the habits of penuriousness and unseemliness, consequent upon the absenteeism of the Baron, and the inexperience of his daughter disappeared, in a few days, under the authority of the French *maitre-*

d'hôtel of the new lady, till Ida scarcely recognised her former desolate home.

Fain would she have joined with Sara and Johann in condemning these foreign innovations, and the change of hours and habits imposed on the Baron;—condemnation was impossible. A ‘Paradise was opened in the wild.’—In lieu of the formality of their former mode of life, and the coarse abundance of their cheer, the table at Rehfeld was now admirably served, while the saloon displayed the polished elegance of metropolitan life. Nay, as if in condescension to her girlish whimsies, for the first time, Ida found herself included in the hunting expeditions which had so often excited her interest and curiosity. The ladies of the party repaired daily to the *rendez-vous de chasse* in an open carriage; and on discovering her step-daughter to be so bold and excellent a horsewoman, the Baroness proposed on more than one occasion, that she should ac-

company her father to the forest, and witness the event of the chase.

“Marguerite, poor little frightened thing, has neither health nor strength for such exploits!” said she; “but you, my dear child, whom a country education has rendered robust, cannot do better than enjoy so harmless and invigorating a means of recreation.”

Of the generosity of this concession, Ida was fully sensible. It was impossible to ride more fearlessly or more gracefully. Her beautiful form was never seen to greater advantage, than when mounted on her favourite mare Katalba, by the side of her father; and the admiration she excited and the greater degree of intimacy promoted by the accidents of the chase with the gentlemen of the party, soon frustrated her projects of reserve, sullenness, or even coldness. With spirits cheered by exercise and excitement, she returned with blooming cheeks to take her part in the pleasures of the evening.

A succession of visitors, connexions of the Baron or members of the *corps diplomatique* at the Residenz, now made their appearance at Schloss Rehfeld. Night after night, music, dancing, charades, tableaux, theatricals, enlivened the place so long abandoned to solitude and neglect. A new world was opened to the young recluse. All that had bewildered her imagination in the recitals of Mademoiselle Thérèse, seemed transported, as by the wand of an enchantress, into the depths of her seclusion.

To her great surprise, moreover, the Baroness, from whom she had expected a gradual change from courtesy to coldness, and from coldness to cruelty, became kinder and kinder as her own reserve wore off. Ida, with ideas formed exclusively from books, having prepared herself to find the breathing world composed of extremely good or extremely bad people, without suspecting that the mediocre preponderate, had imputed pro-

found dissimulation to a worldly woman, incapable of either virtue or vice, and acting merely up to the habits of the class of life in which she had worn away her frivolous existence ; and who was too well disposed in favour of the enjoyments of life, not to promote the pleasures of all around her.

The new Baroness was, as asserted by old Sara, of French extraction, though born of emigrant parents, long settled in Russia. By birth a Vaudreuil, she had been united early in life with the father of Marguerite, and figured as the lovely and popular Countess Erloff, at the brilliant court of the Emperor Alexander. Her beauty and accomplishments, indeed, were supposed to have had some influence in promoting the high appointments obtained by her husband. There was no stain, however, on her reputation ; nor could any one point out the slightest breach of propriety. But the old Count being a man as insignificant in mind as person, there was no other mode of accounting

for the distinctions he enjoyed than the secret influence of his wife.

A son and daughter were the offspring of the alliance. The former, Count Alexis, had been educated at home under the care of a tutor ; while Marguerite, in accordance with the wishes of her maternal grandmother, had accompanied the old Countess de Vaudreuil on her return to Paris, at the general peace, and been placed in a fashionable convent of the Faubourg St. Germain.

It is true, the dissipated habits of life of her mother might have afforded a disadvantageous school to the childhood of the young girl. For Countess Erloff, in constant attendance at court, had little leisure to bestow upon her children ; and when at fifteen, the young Count proceeded to the military college of Les Pages, for the completion of his education, it would have been difficult to say which was the greater stranger to Madame Erloff, the son reared under her roof, or the timid little *pensionnaire* domiciliated in a foreign land.

Frivolous by inheritance, superficial by education, and with no particular call upon her affection from a husband as worldly-minded and even less enlightened than herself, the Countess fancied herself fulfilling the purposes of existence by fluttering through life,—well dressed,—well mannered, living from day to day, and devoid of all thought beyond the pleasures of the morrow.

The aristocracy of a country in the earlier stages of civilization, is sure to be dissipated and thoughtless. On throwing off the sheepskin mantle of its Muscovite barbarity, Russia, as the readiest paraphernalia of state, had assumed, with its crimson velvet and ermine, the unprincipled levities of that of Versailles; and during the reign of Alexander, which was one of favouritism, the court became a temple of marble, at once cold, polished, and deriving its light and heat from artificial means. Prodigality was the order of the day; and the courtiers, like those of Louis XV., took pride in ruining themselves, in

order that their debts might be paid by their royal master.

Unluckily, at the very moment the ruin of Count Erloff was achieved, a claim was made upon his royal master for the debt of nature. Alexander expired in the prime of life, at Taganrog, and a new order of morality was speedily established by his successor. The Erloffs lost their influence, as they had already lost their fortune ; and on the death of the Count, which occurred within a month of the accession of Nicholas I, it was discovered that little or nothing remained for his family, but the deeply mortgaged estates entailed upon his son.

This was a severe blow to the Countess. It was the first moment of serious reflection forced upon her in the course of her life. She was now six-and-thirty ; in the wane of her charms ; impaired in health by a long series of dissipation, and devoid of the maternal sensi-

bilities which might have taught her that the portion of her life, and noblest part of her mission, were still to come. A pension accorded by the Emperor, would have enabled her to live with decency, had she been content to retire into the obscurity of private life, and watch over the cares of the young Count, who had just entered the army ; while from her mother she received constant assurances that Marguerite was becoming all her maternal heart could desire. But the happiness derivable from the discharge of her duties or enjoyment of her natural affections, had no attraction for a woman accustomed through life to flurry and excitement ; and the disconsolate widow would almost as soon have followed her husband to the tomb of all the Erloffs, as her fortunes to the small country house, in which it was suggested to her by her family, that her widowhood might be spent to advantage.

On pretence, therefore, of a desire to bring home her daughter, and after ten years' separation, enjoy a reunion with her mother, Madame Erloff obtained the sanction of the Emperor to her departure for Paris, with the promise of returning in the spring; but not without secret hopes of obtaining a home with her family, or establishing herself in a still more satisfactory manner by a second marriage.

But the Countess de Vaudreuil was a Frenchwoman of the old school; which implies a youth of illusions, and a matter of fact old age. Having arrived at a time of life when the authority of her director and the positive, prevailed over that of the imagination, she assured her discontented daughter that the interests of her son rendered it imperative upon her to fix herself permanently in Russia; that Marguerite, destitute of fortune, could only be suitably married by the influence of her father's connections in her native country.

As to a second marriage for herself, nothing could be more chimerical than such a project, for a widow possessing only two portionless children by way of dowry, in a country like France, where marriage is a matter still "dealt with by attorneyship," even where youth and beauty might be supposed to counterbalance the influence of more current coin.

The last story of the Countess's house of cards, was thus overthrown by a breath; and as, unluckily, the luxury and elegance of the Parisian circles of which she obtained a glimpse, served only to stimulate her disgust at the prospect of a life of retirement, she accompanied her daughter back to her adopted country, at the expiration of her widowhood, with increased discontent; finding in the awkward timidity of a daughter of sixteen, little solace for her disappointments.

It was considered indispensable for the Countess, whether as widow or mother of an

Erloff, to appear at court on occasion of her return after long absence, to St. Petersburg ;— an auspicious necessity, for she had the good fortune to attract the favourable notice of the Empress. Enhanced by the advantages of dress, arising from a prolonged sojourn in Paris, the Countess, subdued by consciousness of her position, and restored to health by seclusion from the dissipations of the world, appeared to peculiar advantage. No one would have surmised her to be the mother of grown-up children, or on the verge of her eight-and-thirtieth year. Anxiously solicitous to please, she became once more a favourite ; and *this* time, in a quarter which allowed no scope for the breath of scandal. Countess Erloff was soon honoured with an appointment in the Imperial household ; and thus, from the depths of her mortification, found herself suddenly elevated to happiness and hope.

It was at this period, that the Baron von Rehfeld made his appearance in Russia, op-

pressed by the awkwardness of a reserved man, and the sense of desolation experienced by every stranger in a foreign country ; thanks to which, the brilliant court of St. Petersburg, proved fifty times less social and agreeable than the circumscribed circles of the Residenz. But that his diplomatic cares left him little leisure for discontent, the Baron would have perhaps indulged in the grumblings emitted by certain English travellers, who not being of the court courtly, have written it down in malice that the city of the Tzar is, of all the cities of Europe, most destitute of amusement.

In the course of the summer, at an entertainment given by the Imperial family at Tzarsko-çelo, the good offices of the Saxon minister presented him to one or two ladies of the household ; and, ere the second winter was at an end, he had discovered that St. Petersburg was, after all, a most agreeable residence ; and that if any thing exceeded in attraction the society of a highly educated and accom-

plished Russian, it was that of a Frenchwoman naturalized on the shores of the Neva.

Rehfeld, who had been selected by his prince to adjust certain questions of frontier perplexity, of which his local knowledge and plain good sense rendered him a fitting expositor, was in fact somewhat less amply qualified to shine in a courtly circle. He was a cold, heavy, or rather reserved man, who, beyond the limited circles of the Residenz, knew nothing of the world; and his faculties were more than usually benumbed by the bedazzlement of a stately court and horde of strangers. Unaware of his deficiencies, he was equally blind to the source from which he derived support and consolation; nor was it till the close of the brilliant winter season, that on discovering he had been spending it highly to his satisfaction, he asked himself the reason; and not only himself, but the whole court of Petersburg, was able to reply, that it was because he had passed it at the side of the handsome and agreeable Countess Erloff!

His mission was now nearly at an end; and the success of his negotiations had been already rewarded by the thanks of his prince, and the affable notice of the Emperor. But as the period of his departure drew near, he was startled to find, from the hints of his brother diplomatists, that it was expected at court his nuptials with the fair and noble widow, so high in imperial favour, would precede his departure. It appeared that, unknown to either of them, he had compromised himself and her. Hints were lavished upon him from what are termed "high quarters," which it was impossible for a man of honour to disregard; the cordial manners and exemplary morality of his own little court, not having prepared him for the interpretation likely to be assigned at Petersburg to his intimacy with a woman of eight-and-thirty.

Rehfeld's first feeling on the discovery, was vexation;—his second, delight. A man of moderate understanding is sure to be perniciously influenced by a first false step in life; and having acted in opposition to the principles of

his caste and nature, in his first marriage, he had ever since assigned undue importance to advantages of birth in a matrimonial alliance. The lady to whom he found himself expected to offer his hand, by birth a Vaudreuil,—by marriage an Erloff,—by circumstance the favourite of an Empress,—possessed in his eyes more consequence than could have been imparted by the possession of mercantile wealth, or obscure beauty; and though aware that the elegant establishment of the Countess was dependent upon a place at court which she must forfeit by marriage with a foreigner, he allowed himself to dwell upon the event less as an inevitable evil, than as a stroke of good fortune.

The address of the lady effected the rest; for she had set her mind upon the match. The advantages of birth and fortune it presented would have scarcely reconciled her to the idea of her hand to a mere country Baron of the empire; but that, Rehfeld having once figured to advantage in the annals of diplomacy,

she trusted to her own skill and influence to attach him for the remainder of his days to a service so indispensably connected with the pomps of a court.

Such was the origin of the marriage! The Baron von Rehfeld had been hurried into proposing; and even after having arranged with the unreluctant Countess that he should return to the Residenz, for the completion of his duties and the family arrangements indispensable for her suitable reception, was again hurried into an acceleration of the ceremony. So well had the Countess already laid the foundations of his future fortune, that a request from the Emperor now fixed him as permanent representative of the court of ——— at that of all the Russias.

It was the announcement of this unexpected piece of good fortune which, more than all her personal courtesies, reconciled the Baron's daughter to the marriage. The ambitious aspirations of Ida von Rehfeld expanded at the

idea of transferring her first appearance in society from the insignificant circles of the Residenz to those of a great capital; and though still of opinion that a step-mother would have formed a serious impediment to her happiness, had she been fated to abide in her ancestral domains, she was content to subside into secondary importance, under the protection of a Baroness von Rehfeld *née Vaudreuil et veuve Erloff*, distinguished by the favours of the sovereign whose smiles were to form the sunshine of her future career. Her only fear was, lest the mother of Marguerite, jealous of her rivalry, should consider it expedient to get rid of her by a suitable marriage in Germany, previous to the Baron's assumption to his duties of office.

They were to spend another month at Rehfeld. A thousand misfortunes might occur in the interim. The boorish cousin, Wilhelm, who divided his attentions at present equally between herself and Marguerite, might be

pressed upon her acceptance by her father; and as there was little fear of the intervention of an heir from the recent marriage of the head of the family, the eligibilities of the connexion were only too disagreeably apparent;—more especially since it had been hinted to her of late, by her good nurse, that, in any other Baronial family than that of which her father was the head, the deterioration of his own unequal match must severely influence the matrimonial destinies of his daughter.

CHAPTER V.

There was just then a kind of a discussion.

A sort of treaty or negociation

Between the Prussian cabinet or Russian,

Maintained with all the due prevarication

With which such states such things are apt to push on.

Something about the Baltic navigation,

Hides, train-oil, tallow, or those rights of Thetis

Which Britons deem their *uti possiditis*.

BYRON.

It was not, however, by way of conciliation to the new lady of Rehfeld that Ida's deportment towards Mademoiselle Erloff soon exhibited an almost sisterly cordiality; for the least observant spectator must have perceived that the maternal sensibility of the Baroness was of a very modified character.

But there was something in the gentle character of Marguerite that appealed powerfully to the heart, while it served to stimulate the curiosity of her step-sister.

In Marguerite Erloff, notwithstanding her half-French, half-Russian origin, Ida beheld the personification of one of the mild visionary maidens so often described by the poets of her own country. Tender, timid, pious, her mind was as devoid of impressions as her heart was replete with sensibility. Educated in strict retirement in one of the severest convents of the Faubourg St. Germain, her exile from her native country had been spent in yearnings after home and mother-love ; and when on her recall to Russia, she found only a cheerless publicity instead of the domestic happiness after which she had been sighing ; and in place of tender parental love, only the authority, tempered by sarcasm, of a mere woman of the world, the poor girl

began to yearn anew for the simple nuns who had superintended her education, and the young companions who used to sympathize in her griefs. Even her occasional visits to the Hotel de Vaudreuil and the dignified notice of her grand-mother had been more cheering than the Russian home where her mother's constant engagements at court and in society, left her perpetually alone.

The marriage of the Countess had been as great a source of satisfaction to Marguerite as the Baron's, of vexation to Ida. She rejoiced at the thoughts of exchanging the formalities of a residence in St. Petersburg, for a fine old château surrounded by streams and forests. Marguerite was acquainted with the country only by name. During the ten years of her life capable of conveying lasting impressions, she had been immured within the walls of a city. Rural sights and rural pleasures were consequently a glorious novelty ; and the rustling of the trees and murmuring of

the waters, conveyed as exquisite a pleasure to this girl on the verge of womanhood, as a light to the eyes of an infant. Schloss Rehfeld, in short, afforded as new a world to Mademoiselle Erloff, as the courtly scenes on which her heart was fixed were about to disclose to the ambitious Mademoiselle von Rehfeld.

Thus is it ever with the human mind; intent upon unknown pleasures and greedy of novel sensations,—weary of happiness, discontented, if the expression be permitted, with content! The easy life led by Ida von Rehfeld, in the home where she was worshipped, had palled upon her feelings and inspired her with feverish longings after the glittering world; while the artificial life of a metropolis had developed the soul of Marguerite with visions of solitude and peace.

“How happy must you have been here!” she exclaimed to her step-sister, one day as they were sauntering together on the terrace of

Schloss Rehfeld, enjoying a fine autumnal sunset and awaiting the return of the Baron and his guests from a distant battue.

“Happy?” was the involuntary ejaculation of her companion. “Rather say devoid of care. The absence of pain does not surely constitute the existence of pleasure!”

“Does it not?” demanded Marguerite with wondering eyes. “Surely it is enough for happiness to live with those who love us; and above all, in a beautiful spot like this, with shadowy woods around us and yonder noble river sweeping in the distance.”

“I admire them very much at this moment,” said Ida frankly, “because they seem to afford you pleasure. But I confess to you, I have often longed for companionship calculated to impart some charm to a landscape which has met my eyes every day of my existence, and taught me to long for change of scene. Russia will afford *me* all the pleasure you are good enough to find at Rehfeld.”

“ I fear not,” said Marguerite despondingly. “ I fear you will often long, at St. Petersburg, for the soft atmosphere and noble prospects of this happy spot. You have very little idea of the life of confinement and ceremony to which you are about to be subjected. Once presented at court, you will live in a continual round of society;—always over-heated and over-lighted rooms;—always glare and tumult. Indeed, indeed, you will only too soon learn to regret the serenity and independence of this place.”

Ida could scarcely refrain from a smile. But it was useless to argue with the simplicity of heart of her companion. Leaving Marguerite, therefore, to indulge in romantic adoration of the ancient oaks of Rehfeld, and to listen, with veneration, to the legends attached by old Sara to the ancestral portraits adorning the picture gallery, she had no difficulty in obtaining, from Mademoiselle Thérèse, all the sympathy she desired in her change of prospects.

When, in the course of their first private interview, the Baron appealed to the filial duty of his daughter to treat with becoming deference and regard the lady of his choice, he had judged it unnecessary to explain to one so young, those deficiencies of fortune which had, perhaps, influenced the imperial favourite to bestow his hand upon a foreigner. He had only enlarged the more upon her influence at court, and her share in procuring him the appointment so flattering to his pride and so advantageous to his prospects; and it was consequently impossible for Ida, the daughter of a portionless and obscure mother, to entertain disparaging views of the personal consequence of her step-mother.

In these deferential opinions, she was now confirmed by Mademoiselle Thérèse; who, on finding in the dreaded Russian Countess a daughter of the noble house of Vaudreuil, and an agreeable pleasure-loving woman, in place of a "haughty Russian," could scarcely

conceal her joy at the prospect of bidding adieu, under such auspices, to the cheerless solitudes of Rehfeld.

“Between my rheumatism and the utter savageness of the place, another winter here would have been the annihilation of me !” was her secret reflexion, after accepting the proposition of the Baroness that she should return with the family to Russia, and take the charge of both her daughters. Thus encouraged in her altered feelings towards Madame von Rehfeld, and enlivening projects for the future, Ida soon became as much elated by the rash step taken by her father, as in the first instance she had been shocked and dispirited.

It was only the faithful old servitors of the family, Johann and Sara, who still remained of opinion that the Baron would live to repent his hasty marriage ; and that the fickle daughter of the Baronial house, who evinced so little regret at the prospect of her approaching

exile, might live to sigh in bitterness of spirit for the tranquil home of her fathers and the simple cordiality of her native land. For, alas, while Marguerite counted with regret the days remaining to her of their sojourn at Schloss Rehfeld, Ida could scarcely conceal her impatience for the moment of their departure !

Pre-occupied by projects for the future, shaped after the brilliant programme unfolded to her expectations by the Baroness, Ida took no further heed than the ceremonial of life rendered indispensable of the guests connected with the Residenz, who, a few weeks before, had assumed such importance in her eyes ; and neither knew nor heeded that the ladies of the court of ———, who came prepared to take offence at the new Baroness, took far greater at her step-daughter ; quitting the castle with the impression that the future bride of their popular young countryman, Wilhelm von Rehfeld, was haughty, reckless and disobliging, in a degree which even her

rare loveliness and brilliant talents did not suffice to atone.

“Thank Heaven, all those tiresome people are gone, at last!” she exclaimed shrugging her shoulders one morning, as the last carriage drove from the court-yard.

“I fancied they were your relations?” observed Mademoiselle Erloff, to whom the observation was addressed.

“Relations who are less than acquaintance,” replied Ida, “and whom I have no wish to make my friends. Of what use is the relationship that affords one neither pleasure nor distinction?”

“I should think it might sometimes afford comfort,” replied Marguerite gently. “But I forgot; *you* have never had occasion to make the discovery. *You* have never needed comfort;—never been away from your own home—your own country.”

“I shall be so shortly,” replied Ida, with an exulting smile. “But I cannot imagine

that St. Petersburg will teach me to affix a value to my father's humdrum cousins. That unsufferable old Baron Grünglatz, for instance, with his natural history, his birds and butterflies, and the great pet moth which he keeps in a glass cage!—What satisfaction or profit could one derive from such a man?"

"I assure you I found him very amusing in the walk we took together yesterday, in the woods, while you were with the hunting party," said Marguerite with earnest simplicity.

"True! Mademoiselle Thérèse told me the old gentleman had made a convert of you; and that you nearly beguiled her into a morass, hunting after curious mosses for his herbal."

"By your own account, dear Ida," rejoined her companion laughing, "my cousin, Alfred de Vaudreuil, betrayed *you* into still greater danger yesterday, by inducing you to leap the stone dyke where Prince Gallitzin met with his fall."

“Believe me, it was well worth while!” cried Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, “if only for the satisfaction of seeing the poor dear Prince, lying wigless among the weeds. You can scarcely imagine any thing more seriously comic, or comically serious, than his countenance, when he rose and shook himself, in order to ascertain what bones were broken.”

“But he had a right to look serious,” remonstrated Marguerite gravely; “for he was so much hurt that, to-day, he keeps his room.”

“He deserves to be hurt. What right has a man of his sober years to be playing boy’s tricks with Monsieur de Vaudreuil?”

“I never allow myself to laugh at the Prince,” replied Marguerite artlessly.

“Indeed? Poor old gentleman!” cried Ida, still indulging in her mirth.

“Why poor?” demanded Marguerite gravely.

“Thus to have forfeited his sole attraction! I thought he was good only to be laughed at!”

“ My mother has a great regard for him,” replied Mademoiselle Erloff; “ and even if I thought his conduct blameable, I should not presume to criticise it, because ——” she paused.

“ Because *what* ?” demanded her more vivacious companion.

“ Because, —— but I have no right to talk about it !” resumed Marguerite checking herself.

“ If you have no confidence in me, you are right to be on your guard,” observed Ida coldly, preparing to leave the room.

“ But I *have* confidence in you ; and I am *not* on my guard. I am *never* on my guard with *you*,” cried Marguerite affectionately, and with a blushing cheek. “ Only I know that my mother particularly dislikes her plans and projects to be prematurely discussed ; and as it was not directly from herself I received my intimation of her views concerning Prince Gallitzin——”

Again she paused ; and Ida, who had the habit of connecting every body's views and projects with herself, was now really interested.

“ It was my brother Alexis,” continued Mademoiselle Erloff, perceiving that her step-sister waited with eager looks for the sequel, “ who once hinted to me that mamma had set her heart upon marrying me, at some future time, to the Prince.”

“ *You ?*—to the Prince ?” cried Ida, all her gravity again forsaking her. “ Why he is forty years older than either of us !”

“ Not quite so much as forty,” rejoined the matter of fact Marguerite.

“ At all events, he is old enough to be your father.”

“ My father was old enough to be my mother's,” observed Mademoiselle Erloff. “ Yet I believe they were very happy together.”

“ Had they been nearer of an age, his widow

might not have thought of a second marriage ; and then, we should never have become acquainted," said Ida, kindly. "On any other grounds, I see nothing to praise in such disproportion of years."

"You are rich—*your* father is still alive to protect and forward your interests," said Marguerite, humbly. "My mother often reminds me that those who, like herself or her daughter, are portionless, must be content to be chosen, not to choose. I ought to esteem myself fortunate, indeed, should I be chosen by one who offers nothing more repellent than his gray hairs. Prince Gallitzin is a man of the highest reputation, and holds a brilliant position in the world "

"Why not place the latter recommendation in due order of precedence?" observed Ida, archly.

"Because, to me, it is not his first recommendation. I should prefer a less public career than must attend his wife."

"If his wife attained any influence over

him, I imagine she might direct his career as she pleased," observed Ida, carelessly.

"I fear not!—His fortune is not very considerable, and—"

"I thought you spoke of him just now as a brilliant match?"

"Brilliant for *me*, and in my peculiar circumstances. So at least my mother described him to Alexis, who seemed gratified by the project. Though only a younger branch of the vast family of Gallitzins, the Prince is highly considered in his own country, as one of the most eminent of our diplomatists. It is expected he will obtain the first vacant embassy; and the Emperor is supposed to have sufficient regard for the memory of my father, to view with satisfaction a match, otherwise, and in point of fortune, so far beneath the pretensions of the Prince."

"An Ambassadors?" ejaculated Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, again laughing almost beyond the limits of politeness. "Dear Marguerite, forgive me!—But the idea of you, who

have not courage to enter the circle of our wretched provincial society here, unless supported by my arm, confronted with royalty and doing the honours of an embassy, appears to me the most ridiculous thing in the world !”

“ Perhaps I should be less timid under such circumstances,” said Marguerite, after a moment’s deliberation. “ Here, I feel myself to be an interloper ; there, I should be supported by the position and character of my husband.”

The word “ husband” from the lips of Mademoiselle Erloff, grated on the ear of Ida. Nevertheless, she could not refrain from exclaiming,

“ Dearest Marguerite ! it must be my fault if you have ever felt an interloper at Rehfeld. I should not easily forgive myself, if I thought you considered yourself in any other light than as my sister, and the daughter of the house.”

Tears, which had been trembling in the eyes of Mademoiselle Erloff, were with difficulty restrained from falling, as she replied,

“ Now, perhaps !—now, indeed, dearest Ida,

you are all that I could wish, and more than I dared to hope. But if you knew what tortures I underwent during the first few days! I saw how much you disliked and mistrusted us all, on our first arrival. My mother had prepared me to expect from you hauteur and opposition; and at first, I saw with trembling, how completely her predictions were likely to be verified. Remember how coldly you treated me! Even your cousin's good-natured notice of the poor stranger at Rehfeld, did not suffice to make me feel otherwise than an alien."

An involuntary blush overspread the features of Mademoiselle von Rehfeld. She could not but perceive that the kinsman whom she despised as a clodpole, had displayed higher breeding in this instance than herself.

"And when is this marriage between you and the old Prince likely to take place?" she demanded, trying to rally her spirits.

"I have told you all I know on the subject," replied Marguerite, mildly.

“But have you no curiosity to make inquiries on the subject?” inquired Ida, almost impatient of her languor.

“I could scarcely have done so without displeasing my mother,” she replied. “It is for her to dispose of my destinies. When she wishes me to know her intentions, she will doubtless signify them.”

Ida was startled, almost alarmed, by indications of such implicit filial submission. It occurred to her, that a time might come when some sacrifice imposed upon herself would demand similar obedience. Hitherto, her father's exactions had been so few and reasonable, that the rein of duty had been unfelt. But since his new wife demanded such blind and abject deference of her children, what security had Ida that her own destinies might not be submitted to authority equally arbitrary?

After Mademoiselle Erloff had quitted the room, however, her reflections assumed a different colour. Though her admiration of Margue-

rite's guileless and feminine gentleness was a genuine feeling, these first kindly sentiments towards her step-sister, had been prompted by a consciousness of superiority. Marguerite was beneath her in personal beauty, beneath her in fortunes, beneath her in abilities; and superior only in the modesty of nature, which enabled her to recognise and submit to these distinctions of their relative position. But Marguerite, about to become a Princess—about to become an Ambassadress,—was a different personage. Ida felt that it would be difficult to forgive the acquirement of such advantages. Nay, she even began to mistrust the humility of the young Russian, as simply an exercise of patience while awaiting the advent of more auspicious fortunes.

“After all,” mused Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, in the spirit which had prompted her former rebellious disgusts against the obscure monotony of her natural home,—“after all, in Russia, even if favoured as now by the Baroness,

and beloved as ever by my father, I must still be a stranger—an alien. My position will be one of utter insignificance. Even as daughter to one of the members of the diplomatic body, it must be most subordinate. The envoy of one of the petty states of the empire, must rank immeasurably below the Ambassadors of the great powers—and his daughter immeasurably below theirs. As to marriage, the Emperor is said to oppose the alliance of his more influential subjects with foreigners of whatever rank. In Russia, therefore, I can make only very inferior connections ; while Marguerite, timid, unambitious, poor—Marguerite, who is grateful for the attentions of a Wilhelm von Rehfeld, is about to obtain the highest precedence, and to command the brightest destinies !”

Though Mademoiselle Erloff had exacted no promises of discretion, Ida felt herself interdicted from discussing this flattering project of alliance even with their common preceptress.

But it was not the less constantly the subject of her reflections, from the impossibility under which she laboured of giving way to her surprise.

She now began, for the first time, to consider with interest the grave and somewhat formal man who was about to elevate her companion to dignities so unexpected. Unconsciously to herself, Ida had suffered her vanity to be flattered during the preceding month of festivities, by the attentions of the young Count de Vaudreuil, a near kinsman of the Baroness, who was on his return to Paris, after a summer tour to the bathing-places of Germany. Alfred was gay, good-looking, well-bred. The playful and somewhat sarcastic turn of his mind had served to recommend him to her favour ; more especially when his sallies were directed against the recreant cousin, who had been judged unworthy her notice till he saw fit to accord his own to a rival.

Unaccustomed to the gallantry of French

manners, Ida interpreted the flowery compliments of the lively Parisian into expressions of warm admiration. Like a European accepting as positive the hyperbolical offers of service of an Oriental host, she seriously believed herself, when assured that she was *mise à ravir*, or that she sang *comme un ange*, to be angelic and enchanting in the eyes of one who probably saw in her only the pretty, but affected daughter of a *hobereau de l'Empire*.

But that he was an inmate under her father's roof, and that his cousin, the Baroness, had begged him to be gracious to even the remote branches of the family tree on which her poverty had compelled her to engraft herself, Alfred de Vaudreuil would not, in the first instance, have so far derogated from his habits of life, or outraged the usages of his country, as to devote the slightest attention to an unmarried girl, even if an angel—or better than an angel—an heiress. On his arrival at Rehfeld with the bridal party, which he joined at the

Residenz on his way from the baths of Töplitz, he had resigned himself to the *corvée* of being civil to the provincial damsel, whose good will was indispensable to the happiness of his pretty cousin Marguerite ; in whom he was interested from having seen her, in his earlier days, enjoying her conventual holidays in the solemn saloon of their common relative, the old Countess de Vaudreuil.

By degrees, this feeling of concession assumed another form. In Ida, he recognized a kindred spirit. He found her quick-witted and scornful ; and urged by the instinct of Parisian self-sufficiency, whispered to himself that she was almost worthy to have been a countrywoman of his own.

Still, his feelings were far from being touched in the tender point conjectured by the inexperience of Mademoiselle von Rehfeld. Even at the most critical moment of the compliments in which she placed her girlish faith, he was fully alive to her provinciality ; and it was

Alfred de Vaudreuil who had originally urged the Baroness to remodel the dress of her fair step-daughter after the elegant simplicity of his cousin Marguerite.

“Poor child! Let us have some mercy on her susceptibility,” was the rejoinder of Madame von Rehfeld. “Her little head has been filled by the vulgar adulation of servants, with absurd notions of her own self-consequence. To tell her at once that she is a mass of conceit and vulgarity, would precipitate her too cruelly from her pedestal, and her spirit would break in the fall. We must achieve her reformation by degrees. With Marguerite ever before her eyes, she will discover the bad taste of her tone of assumption. To humiliate a person too severely, is to make an enemy for life.”

It was soon, however, the Baroness's turn to remonstrate with Alfred on his injudicious treatment of her step-daughter.

“I am thankful to you,” said she, “for the hints you afford her concerning the habits of

civilized life. But your lessons on manners, dress, conversation, are lessons that convey more than you intend, or at least, more than I desire. This poor girl, unconscious of your motives, will fancy you profoundly interested in her improvement; and so far from rendering her more humble, *cher petit cousin*, you have increased her vanity a thousand fold."

Vaudreuil had now, however, discovered a singular charm in the loveliness and brilliancy of Ida, owing probably to the absence of better amusement in the circumscribed circle of Schloss Rehfeld. If his attentions became modified, in presence of his observant kinswoman, they were redoubled in the thousand opportunities afforded by their hunting parties and *petits jeux*; and the mystery in which he now affected to envelope his devotion, served only to encrease its charm. The compliments which had soothed when said, enchanted when whispered. Vaudreuil himself experienced all the charm of prohibition in the intimacy; and

Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, accepting his exaggerated declarations of sentiment as credulously as some poor Indian the glass beads of a new settler, ran considerable risk of having her feelings entangled in a dangerous and fruitless attachment.

Such was the state of affairs, when new feelings were opportunely called into existence by the revelations of her step-sister ; by which the vanity of Ida received a shock secondary only to that arising from the marriage of her father. In her intimacy with the Parisian kinsman of her new connexions, she had taken no thought beyond the amusement of the moment ; and now, startled into self-possession, she recalled to mind that she had been committing herself in the eyes of Prince Galitzin, and the whole circle, by accepting and encouraging the attentions of a foreign *cadet de famille*, a bird of passage, who had probably been amusing himself at her expense ; while the cunning Baroness, sanctioning by non-in-

tervention her seeming levity, was enhancing the charm of her daughter's feminine modesty of deportment in the eyes of the future Ambassador.

Vain of her supposed conquest, Ida had, in fact, resisted and resented the private representations of her faithful, and well-intentioned, though somewhat frivolous governess, that her familiarity with a man of Count Alfred de Vaudreuil's age, with whom she had no ties of consanguinity, was contrary to *les bienséances*. Persuaded that Mademoiselle Thérèse was lecturing her at the instigation of her solemn cousin Wilhelm, who, ere he quitted Schloss Rehfeld, had afforded unmistakeable tokens of disapproval, Ida persisted in encouraging the sallies of the young Count at his expense, both by her plaudits and rejoinders.

She now recalled to mind the grave countenance with which the taciturn Prince had occasionally listened to these effusions of flippancy. She had, more than once, detected

him with his eyes and ears inquisitorially fixed upon her proceedings; and had, at first, secretly accused him of officiating as the spy of her step-mother. She now saw his conduct in a different point of view. He was probably congratulating himself on the superiority of mind and manners of his gentle Marguerite. Arrived at St. Petersburg, he would, perhaps, withdraw his notice from one so ill-versed in the graces and decorums of the great world; and, on his marriage, interdict all further intimacy between herself and the future Ambassadors.

The speculations of poor Ida on these points were not of long duration. But ere she had determined on the line of conduct to be adopted, Prince Gallitzin, preparatory to the general break-up of the party, quitted the hospitable roof of Rehfeld for an excursion to Dresden and Berlin, previous to his return to Russia; and the following day, the Baron himself, who was compelled to a week's sojourn at the court

of the Residenz, for the renewal of his instructions and arrangement of his family interests, took his departure.

Till within a few days of leaving Schloss Rehfeld, it had been arranged that, on the very eve of their departure for the Residenz, the Count de Vaudreuil was to commence his journey southward, on his return to Paris.

"We shall, at least, be on the road at the same moment, enduring the same hazards of time and tide, and fixing our eyes at midnight on the same fair stars!"—was his significant whisper to Ida, as he stood beside her one morning in the old picture gallery, where she was taking an unreluctant farewell of the grim faces of the Barons of her race.

"You, on your way to the renewal of former pleasures, I on mine, I trust, to inauguration into new ones!" was the careless reply of Mademoiselle von Rehfeld.

"New ones that will soon obliterate all trace of those happy moments which must render *my* attempts at renewal hopeless ones!"

replied the Count, more in earnest than he intended, or suspected.

“It is no great compliment to you,” faltered Ida, in reply, “to admit that I had far rather pass my noviciate in Paris, than in St. Petersburg; or if perforce at St. Petersburg, that I heartily wish you were about to share my experiment.”

To so frank a declaration, Alfred replied of course by a whisper so low, that its purport, had any third person been present, could only have been surmised from the heightened colour of the audistress. But at that moment, and before the confusion of either had abated, Mademoiselle Erloff, breathless and terrified, rushed into the gallery, imploring their instant aid in behalf of Mademoiselle Thérèse; who, in the hurry of the arrangements consequent upon their approaching departure, had undergone a severe fall down the marble steps of the grand stair-case, and was writhing in agony at the bottom.

The alarm was soon given in the château, the sufferer removed, and the usual allowance of sympathy and eau de Cologne administered. At first, the injury was pronounced by village authority to be a fracture of the leg. But the nature of the accident requiring instant surgical assistance, it was soon discovered that the still more tedious evil of a dislocation formed the limit of the evil; whereupon, the Baroness was heard to ejaculate more audibly than politeness rendered desirable—

“A dislocation of the ankle? Thank heaven! I was sadly afraid our journey would have been delayed. A dislocation is nothing so serious as to require our presence.”

“But poor Mademoiselle Thérèse will not be able to put her foot to the ground for six weeks or two months to come!” was Marguerite’s innocent remonstrance—Ida being fortunately absent, engaged in attendance upon the sufferer.

“I know it, child, I know it!” rejoined the

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Baroness. "In either case, her accompanying us would be out of the question; a *contretemps*, certainly, for I shall find it difficult to procure for you a *demoiselle de compagnie* of equally good manners with *cette pauvre Thérèse*, on whom I can implicitly rely. Anything better, however, than a compulsory delay; which I suppose must have been borne with had there been danger, or any thing of that kind. As it is, the invalid will be excellently taken care of during her illness, by the worthy old heads of the establishment here; and on her recovery, may still rejoin us in the spring—if, indeed, she feel inclined to brave the ill omens preceding her Russian journey."

By the Baron and his daughter, the accident that deprived them of a kind and trust-worthy assistant, was somewhat more compassionately considered. With all her self-reliance, Ida recoiled from the idea of the isolation in which she was about to depart for a foreign

country; and tears, which she had little expected to fall from her eyes on quitting her long distasteful home, moistened the pillow of the poor disappointed governess, as her pupil bent over her for a farewell embrace.

“Do not weep thus, dear child!” faltered she, in the sanguine spirit of her country. —“Trust me, my sweetest Ida, I shall have courage to rejoin you, the moment the effects of this unlucky accident have disappeared. If Peter had only been in the way to carry down the chess-box and work-box of Madame la Baronne, which I had in my arms when my foot slipped, this horrible disaster would not have happened!”

“But you will never be able to undertake so long and arduous a journey alone?”—remonstrated Mademoiselle von Rehfeld.

“Oh! yes, I am afraid of nothing. My heart is full of spirit and adventure. I travelled, you know, from Paris to Dresden, alone.

I admit that it would have been far more agreeable to make the journey to St. Petersburg in your company, dearest Ida ; and if Peter had only been in the way to carry down the——

“But a long confinement at Schloss Rehfeld, *chère bonne !*”—again interrupted Ida, in a tone of sincere commiseration. “I cannot bear to think of the dreariness of your long winter here !”

“Think rather, then, of my good fortune in not having broken my leg, and possibly been lamed for life !” cried the cheerful-minded Frenchwoman. “I consider myself lucky it is no worse ; and though, if Peter had been in the way to——”

“If you feel at all alarmed at the idea of remaining here alone, I will still entreat papa to allow me to bear you company, and rejoin him with you in the spring,” faltered Ida, conscious that the offer of such a sacrifice was due to her kind old friend, yet somewhat alarmed lest it should be accepted.

“And so lose the pleasures of the carnival, and the galas at court? Not for twenty thousand worlds, my dear child!” exclaimed Mademoiselle Thérèse, with real warmth and sincerity. “No, no!—it is perhaps better for you, who have been so little accustomed to make your own way in the world, to be at length thrown upon your own resources. Besides, dear Ida, we shall enjoy a constant correspondance!—Think what delight it will afford me, in my sick room, to receive your gay and original remarks upon a new country—a new court—a new people!—Conceive all the novel impressions you will have to receive and communicate!”—

“A poor compensation for all your sufferings!”—sighed Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, consciously.

“But you owe me no compensation, my dear child. *You* had no share in the accident. You have often warned me, Ida, against those slippery marble stairs; and had not Peter

been out of the way at that moment, when his services were particularly required to carry down things for packing the *fourgon*, I——”

“At all events, I engage that both Marguerite and myself will prove most assiduous correspondents,”—interposed Ida. “You shall have the fullest details of all we see, hear, or imagine. Nay, do not thank me for the promise!—It will be the greatest comfort to me to find myself still in intimate communication with my kindest of friends.”

But though nothing could be more sincere than Ida's lamentations over this unexpected separation from the preceptress whose instructions had afforded her first insight into the pleasures of society, and cheered the flight of her young ambition, she was almost consoled for her loss, on learning that the Baroness had succeeded in inducing Monsieur de Vaudreuil to accept the place in their travelling party left vacant by the absence of Mademoiselle

Thérèse. The Count had long thrown out hints that persuasion only was wanting to determine him to the sacrifice of a winter in St. Petersburg, in order to prolong his association with a circle so delightful ; and Rehfeld, whose taciturnity of nature was relieved by the presence of a voluble and agreeable inmate, and who was perhaps a little gratified by the idea of reappearing in Russia, supported by one of the nearest family connections of the Baroness, was so warm in his invitations, that nothing appeared more natural than this sudden change of plan. It was of course only to Mademoiselle von Rehfeld's private ear, Count Alfred saw fit to disclose the more secret motives of his resignation of his beloved Paris, in favour of the frozen shores of the Neva !—

The following week found the whole party undergoing the *peine forte et dure* of the duodecimo courtiership of the Residenz ; and it needed all the deference exacted by Ida's filial

duty, and the sense of politeness of his new relatives, to conceal from Baron von Rehfeld, the impatience with which they submitted to the impediment to their journey, produced by that absurd Ko Too of courtly state, which is redeemed from the ridiculous only when practised on a sufficient scale. The miniature Versailleship of ——— was accordingly an object of such poignant ridicule to the Count de Vaudreuil, that Ida could scarcely pardon herself for having ever regarded it with respect.

A fortnight later, and she was enabled to discover that nearly the same ceremonies she had contemned as puerile in a duchy, commanded her reverence as august, when invested with the colossal proportions of an imperial court.

In order, however, to do justice to her impressions under circumstances so exciting, it may be as well to snatch from the hands of the courier, the correspondence of Ida von

Rehfeld and Marguerite Erloff with Mademoiselle Thérèse Moreau, as well as of Count Alfred de Vaudreuil with various members of his family; and more than one circle, closely connected with the Imperial Court of 182*, will be found authentically portrayed in the following letters.

LETTER I.

FROM IDA VON REHFELD, TO MADEMOISELLE
THERESE MOREAU.

At length, *chère bonne*, our object is accomplished, and I am able to date my letter in good fair round text from “ST. PETERSBURG.” Yes ! your poor rustic child of Schloss Rehfeld, is now an inhabitant of the capital of all the Russias !

How grand an air the name carries with it —“ Capital of ALL the Russias !” Yet you and Alfred de Vaudreuil have done your best to convince me, that ALL the Russias, red, white, or black, in combination, are scarcely to be weighed in the balance against your single France—or rather Paris, for neither of you appear to recognize much beyond the walls of that glorious (or dare I say it?) *vain* glorious city !—

Do not forget, dearest *bonne*, that, as regards our correspondence, you have been considerate enough to renounce all former privileges of office; and that I am to open my heart to you as to a wiser and better self, or more truly, as to the most indulgent of friends. I have undertaken to make you forget the distance intervening between us; while *you* must promise to overlook that of our relative age and position, and condescend to treat me as a woman, in order that I may become one the sooner.

We arrived here the day before yesterday. Accept us, therefore, as fairly settled. Marguerite, who is fond of such details, assures me she has given you a full account of our journey and its grievances, minor and major; which, had you seen how impatiently they were endured by Count Alfred, you might have estimated as of some importance. But my uneventful life has taught me to regard such contrarieties as the inconveniences of a

way side inn, as a relief, after the monotony of Schloss Rehfeld; and could any thing have amused me more than our bad suppers and the strangeness of the people by whom they were served, it would have been the indignation of the Baroness and Monsieur de Vaudreuil; both of whom, ended by becoming seriously angry with me, for my indifference to their martyrdom.

Enough, however, of a journey which, since my mind misgives me that you will scarcely find courage to rejoin us on your restoration to health, cannot be very interesting. Suffice it that we are here, with our due allowance of limbs; and that a couple of days has enabled even the grumblers to recover the fatigues of the expedition, and the jolting over the timbered roads which Alfred found so detestable.

At present, the winter sets in with scarcely more severity than our own; but the Neva is beginning to freeze, which is the signal for its worst. We reside in a street opening on the

Nevskoi Prospekt, which Marguerite calls the Rue St. Honoré of St. Petersburg; being a league and a half in length, and containing in its successive districts the handsomest shops and noblest private houses. It is truly an Imperial causeway. Our house, or as Wilhelm von Rehfeld would call it, the Hotel of the Legation, has a courtyard in front, and garden behind; closely resembling, according to Monsieur de Vaudreuil's account, those of the Faubourg St. Germain. My father's apartments, which are spacious and handsome, are on the ground floor; those of the Baroness on the first, and Marguerite and I have two charming little suites adjoining. There is an empty set of rooms on the second floor, which my father offered to the use of Count Alfred. But I conclude he preferred independence; as he has installed himself in an *Hôtel garni*, the Hotel Demuth; said to be the best here, but which he declares to be the most detestable in the world. All travellers, however, even the least

fastidious, agree in condemning the public accommodations in St. Petersburg.

And now, dearest, how shall I admit to you, in the name of your two disciples, that Marguerite evinces as little patriotism on her return to her native country, as your ungrateful Ida on quitting Germany? Tell it not to the good Pastor—publish it not to my excellent Sara! But even as I had a long farewell to our forests without a particle of regret, did Marguerite, after four months' absence, salute the shores of the Neva, with tears in her eyes.—It promises ill for my happiness here, that Mademoiselle Erloff should see so much to regret in a dull château of our obscure province!—But I comfort myself by the suspicion that her timidity and indolence render the stirring life of this city distasteful to her; for the Baroness still persists in assuring me that, *out* of Paris, St. Petersburg affords the most agreeable residence in Europe. Will not this tempt you to renounce your

projects, ere you settle for the remainder of your days in the Rue du Bac; and take a peep at your child, playing her new part in her new home?—

But for the week we spent at the Residenz after leaving Rehfeld, I should have been terrified by the tumults of this place. Alfred de Vaudreuil protests, on the contrary, that it is only a splendid desart; and has already pronounced the capital of all the Russias to be right worthy a population of Bears.

To me, everything appears new, grand, and exciting. My father's establishment is on a scale suitable with his fortune and diplomatic position; and being arranged by the Baroness essentially *à la Russe*, I am not a little amused by the multiplicity of servants, who seem to render the whole house an antechamber.

The apartments appropriated to reception, are magnificently furnished, the inlaid parquets beautiful. The scagliola — particularly that

which imitates alabaster—is dazzlingly brilliant; and the Baroness's boudoir hung with dove coloured silk and ornamented with a beautiful set of malachite vases and tables presented to her by the Empress on her marriage, is elegance itself.

My own little drawing-room and bed-room, by an act of gracious kindness on the part of Madame von Rehfeld, are arranged precisely in the style of those I occupied at home. I accept with gratitude this token of conciliation; but must confess that I had pondered long enough over those old hangings and fauteuils, to have been as well satisfied with newer objects. *Entre nous*, I could have been content to bequeath my cousin Wilhelm and the yellow curtains to Schloss Rehfeld! But for the fear of offending my step-mother, I would have proposed transferring both the heavy furniture and heavy kinsman to her daughter;—our dear, good, simple Marguerite, still persisting in her enthusiasm for all things German.

You will be diverted to learn, *chère bonne*, that already, a cabinet council of mantua-makers and milliners, has been gathered together, preparatory to our presentation at court. French of course :—every thing here connected with fashion, being as Parisian as yourself. In spite of the Emperor's remonstrances and prohibitions, the ladies of the Imperial family, and those immediately surrounding them, persist in importing all they wear from Paris. Just as you once told me the Empress Joséphine used to torment and irritate Napoleon by wearing India muslins and British lace, does our Empress delight in being the least Russian possible, in matters of the toilet. Perhaps it would be as well if legislators let such trifles alone. But legislators have always pretended that the greatest matters consist in a concatenation of trifles ; and I will therefore take for granted that the prosperity of Russia is seriously compromised by the cases of caps, hats, and *manteaux de cour*, which reach the

Imperial palace from the hands of Herbault and Victorine.

I write to-day, only to announce our inauguration. By the next courier, I shall have more to tell you than that, in spite of the untold number of versts dividing us, I am with my dear *bonne* in the spirit;—wanting only her presence to complete my happiness both present, and in anticipation.—Farewell!

LETTER II.

FROM COUNT ALFRED DE VAUDREUIL, TO
HIS BROTHER COUNT JULES, IN PARIS.

In spite of your remonstrances, dear Jules, *me voici*!—ay, here,—here, at St. Petersburg, in the half civilized capital of a scarcely quarter civilized empire!—

When I mentioned, in my last letter, that I had given up the project, I was sincere. But what would you have?—Man proposes, woman disposes! On quitting Baden last August, I found myself with a couple of idle months on my hands, previous to the commencement of our Paris season. You would not have had me instal myself in our dear dull Faubourg, till the Italian Opera was open, or your own return from Burgundy?—A tour through Germany presented itself as an agreeable alternative. Carlsbad and Töplitz

were new to me. I wanted to see the Dresden gallery—I wanted to see Leipsig and visit the spot where my father—— But why dwell on these things? It was at *your* suggestion I extended my travels through Saxony, in search of the more than gothic domain, where our worthy aunt, the Countess Auguste, insisted upon my visiting her daughter and grand-daughter, that I might satisfy her mind on my return touching this new family alliance.

I found precisely what might have been expected; that is, precisely what *I* expected;—a half furnished barrack of a house, in the centre of a domain stocked with boar, roebuck, and a German Baron as stiff as his own pedigree; and, I should imagine, a head as ill furnished as his château, or he would scarcely have taken to wife our hyperborean cousin, a woman neither young nor pretty, with two grown up children for her dowry! The Goth, however, was hospitable and civil; and had collected about him a few people, not altogether un-

bearable ; that is, not altogether unbearable, considering the excellence of his Jagd and old Hochheimer—the special recommendations of Schloss Rehfeld.

Methinks I hear you exclaim, dear Jules, that, as regards old Hock, our uncle the Archbishop's cellars are too well stored to entail the necessity of a visit to the banks of the Oder on any member of our family ; while, as to wild-boar and roebuck, your estates in Burgundy have been accounted worthy mention in the annals of sportsmanship.—True, alas !—a most irrefragable truth ! —It stands, therefore, confessed that some less ostensible motive must have formed my attraction northward of Töplitz.

If you could see her, my dear Jules, you would forgive my weakness, though it requires something more than the charm of mere beauty, to induce me to pardon myself.

You and I, who for the last ten years, ever since we quitted, at fifteen, our quarters at the Col-

lège de Louis le Grand, have been sighing at the feet or in the arms of angels born to invalidate the proverb of '*fair as an angel*,' you and I must candidly admit that, character and expression apart, the faces of our loving country women are any thing but celestial. In the inexperience of boyhood, I plead guilty to having found a charm in more than one sallow complexion, deriving character from fine features and an expressive physiognomy. But there comes a time when even the lightnings of the most animated eyes fail to blind one to that deficiency of bloom and youthfulness, which our Parisians acquire even in the fullness of girlhood.

In short, dear Jules, for why weary either you or myself by prolixity, the dark down on the scornful upper lip of *cette chère Marquise*, and the too frequent contraction of the finest eyebrows in the Faubourg St. Germain, had prepared the way for the spell exercised over my feelings by the Saxon beau-

ty and transparent complexion of the lovely Ida. To me, I own, she appeared, on our arrival at Schloss Rehfeld, a being of a different sphere.

Her manners, I found almost as attractive as her person. Were my acquaintance with the Teutonic fair more extensive, I should probably have discerned in her deportment, only the ordinary worthfulness—permit me to Saxonize—of homely provincial human nature. But I know little of these people. At Baden, I associated only with our Paris friends; at Carlsbad and Töplitz, with Russians; or at most, a few people from Vienna, who have rubbed off their national virtues and national rusticity. The Baron's daughter was consequently the first specimen that met my eye of an inartificiality of manner, easily mistaken, at first sight, for inartificiality of character. Seeing her so unversed in the habits of society, I set her down as an original of the *ingénues* of our stage;—a species unknown among ourselves, saving in theatricals.

In the beginning, therefore, I patronized her as a child—an awkward, pretty, well-meaning child; nor was it till I had been startled by two or three astringent repartees, that I allowed myself to discover—I was going to say, a snake in the grass, but beg you will substitute some more courteous expression.

I was disappointed. I wanted to find my flaxen angel with the soft down of angelic purity on her wings; as different in mind as in person, from our more piquant charmers of the Faubourg. It did not suit my prejudices that this fairest of lilies should prove as thorny as all my other roses.

The mystery was soon explained. You, my wise brother, who are cautious enough never to lose sight of your beloved Seine; you, an *enfant des Boulevards*, (as Labenski once insultingly called you), have very little idea how searchingly our detestable Parisianism has pervaded Europe,—destroying all nationality, all originality of character. Cham-

pagne and French governesses are to be found even in the steppes of Tartary; and it soon appeared that Schloss Rehfeld, like every other Schloss from the Rhine to the Dnieper, contained a certain Mademoiselle Thérèse something or other, who had done her worst to render my angel witty as well as pretty, and add cloven feet to my Saxon lamb. It is the custom of Paris, it seems, to export last year's fashions, faded bonnets and soiled laces, to England, Russia, America and other outlandish countries, where they still retain the gloss of novelty. In the same manner, when a governess is pronounced incompetent or becomes superannuated in Paris, she is shipped off to preside over the education of some heiress in great Britain, or Countess of the Russian Empire. Should you ever renounce your vocation, Jules, and become a travelled man, let this plead in extenuation of the singularly bad manners of certain ultra-mundane, divinities of the highest descent.

The Mademoiselle Thérèse in question,

is precisely one of those to whom I alluded ; — ignorant, like every French woman of fifty, whose education was necessarily arrested by our first fatal revolution ; — and having spent the last dozen years of her life, enclosed within the walls of the Hôtel de Choisy, which, I need not remind you, is one of the few that has undergone neither fumigation nor ventilation since the Pompadourism of Louis XV. Though she has in some degree respected the simplicity of the poor child's manners—probably attracted by a sort of Opéra Comique pastorality in the whole thing—she has, at the same time, inspired her with notions so strange, that poor Ida's mind presented, on our arrival, an unique *mélange* ; which I can only exemplify as a ground work of linsey woolsey, embroidered with the richest flowers of brocade.

Though for a moment disappointed, I soon began to discover that this was newer and more amusing than if the *whole* texture

had been of linsey woolsey or brocade. It was a chaos to reduce to order; a labyrinth to unravel. My curiosity was excited; and it is something, allow me to tell you, at *our* age—for a Parisian five and twenty, ranks with the grand climacteric of any other country in the world,—to have one's curiosity excited.

Fortunately, our excellent cousin favoured its indulgence; perhaps, because apprehensive that I might let fall a withering glance on her own gentle, but insignificant Marguerite, a girl, *par parenthèse*, whose nature corresponds miraculously with her *banal* daisy name. For scarcely were we installed at Schloss Rehfeld, when she pointed out to me, in despair, the detestable provinciality of her step-daughter's dress and manners; bewailing her hard fate in having such a mill-stone strung round the neck of her Saxon Barony, and imploring my aid in rendering her presentable previous to her *début* in a more courtly circle.

I did my best; that is, I did my worst. But the task which I had undertaken almost as a *corvée*, became supportable through the aptitude of my scholar. I found that it was a diamond of the first water, which I had mistaken for a pebble.

I was almost in despair as the period drew near, to which, six weeks before, I had been looking forward as my signal of release from sauerkraut and sourer bread and wine. Somehow or other, the fair Ida had wound herself, I was about to say, round my heart, but will not insult either your understanding, or my own by such puerilities. In short, I did not like to part with her;—perhaps because assured that it would break her little heart to part with *me*.

The Gods and the Baroness prospered my repinings. Just as I was beating my brains for a pretext to discover some species of business requiring my presence in Russia—(I had almost thought of asking you to beg

from your friend Demidoff, a superintendancy of copper-mines !) just as I was growing, I say, most sentimentally perplexed, the antiquated damsel who, for the benefit of the family, had better have broken her neck three years ago, had the fortune to break her leg—sprain her ankle—no matter what ; and the Baroness, who was beginning, under my enlightenment, to discover the insufficiency of Mademoiselle Thérèse, eagerly seized upon a pretence to leave her behind.

No sooner was this matter arranged, than she honoured me with a strenuous invitation to accept her place ; nay, almost to undertake her vocation as preceptress in the family. A singular notion, you will say !—But the poor dear Baroness possesses in a supreme degree our family weakness of clanship ; and, as becomes a Vaudreuil, believes in my infallibility. Though all she knows of Paris, consists in a dreary year of widowhood in the still drearier Hotel of the dear old Countess Auguste, she expe-

riences the warmest interest in all things Parisian; and is, moreover, pretty well aware that the presence of such a cavalier as your younger brother, will be no deterioration to her circle in this most savage capital.

“You must positively accompany us, dear cousin,” cried she, on the announcement of Mademoiselle Thérèse’s misfortune. “You have taught us the difficulty of dispensing with your society. Conceive the acquisition you will be to me.”

It was not exactly my importance to the Baroness that was likely to determine me to such a journey. Nevertheless, I contrived to look overwhelmed with gratification; having begun to regard Madame von Rehfeld, née Vaudreuil, as grand jewel-keeper to my crown.

“With so a great charge upon my hands, as two unmarried girls, both introduced into society, and without even a *dame de compagnie* to superintend their proceedings when my position in official society shall require my

leaving them at home," said she, "judge what will be my anxieties ! My son is absent from St. Petersburg ; and were he on the spot, Alexis is too wild and volatile to be trusted as the escort even of his sister. You, my dear Alfred, are essentially a man of the world. To you, two girls of the age of Ida and Marguerite, are no more than two angels carved in alabaster in some ancient cathedral. I am conscious that a Vaudreuil, a man of your birth and breeding, will give them only the best advice, as well as afford them the sort of championship, which the occupations of the Baron von Rehfeld render it impossible to expect at his hands. Received with open arms at the Imperial Court, you will become our cavalier at all the winter fetes, and I foresee a delightful winter !"

So do I, my dear Jules !—For in the sequel, I suffered myself to be persuaded ; and here I am—the pet of a family circle, including two of the prettiest girls in St. Petersburg, or

any other burg ; and a chaperon, who sees every thing I do, say, or imagine, *en couleur de rose*.

I have, I perceived, left myself no space to glance beyond this charming family circle. But in my next letter, expect a detailed picture of what interests you perhaps more than myself—the Russian Capital and people.

LETTER III.

FROM MARGUERITE ERLOFF, TO MADE-
MOISELLE THERESE MOREAU.

We are all anxiety, Mademoiselle, to learn the progress you have made in your recovery; and, but that I trust the milder climate of your valley has been more auspicious than our Finland gales, I should have noted with fear and trembling the recent severities of weather we have experienced here.

You may imagine how anxiously I have watched the influence of this severity upon the comfort of our dearest Ida. But she is good enough to fancy that the admirable distribution of our stoves, procures her a pleasanter climate than awaited her at home; where she assures me that winter, among the hoary forests of Rehfeld, was frightfully intense.

For your sake, Mademoiselle, I earnestly hope this may be only a gracious exaggeration on the part of my sister, to spare me the mortification of suspecting her repinings.

Du reste, she is as well in health, as gay in spirits. I could almost fancy, from her cheerfulness, that she was aware of the great addition afforded by her society to the happiness of her poor Marguerite. Till my mother's marriage, without any companion of my age, I was discontented with home, disgusted with Russia. I am now the happiest of the happy! My brother is to be here in the course of the ensuing month; and my impatience to see him again is almost forgotten in the liveliness of Ida's original remarks on the new objects and customs that arrest *her* notice at every turn, though they have ceased to attract my own. Charming as I found her at Schloss Rehfeld, here she appears to me a thousand times more brilliant and more attractive.

At present, my sister has been little seen in society ; the Court having returned only yesterday, so that her presentation has been delayed. The admiration she excites among the chosen few admitted into our private circle, affords every confirmation of my mother's prognostications, that the Lily of Rehfeld would *faire fureur* in Russia.

Of our common friends here, I will name only my cousin Alfred, who appears enchanted with his journey ; and but for its sad origin in your afflicting accident, I should congratulate myself on our having secured so cheerful a companion to lessen to dearest Ida the sense of loneliness inseparable from sojourn in a strange country. Ida, so gracious in her adoption of my mother as a parent, myself as a sister, appears even to accept Alfred as a kinsman.

Be, therefore, under no uneasiness, Mademoiselle, for the happiness of your child. She will be watched over, loved and tended here, as

at Schloss Rehfeld. Your expected letter will, I trust, afford us all that is wanting to our satisfaction, in an account of the improved state of your health.

LETTER IV.

COUNT ALFRED DE VAUDREUIL, TO
COUNTESS AUGUSTE DE VAUDREUIL IN
PARIS.

Belle tante, I throw myself at your feet, and on your mercy. You are indignant, I find, that, on quitting Paris last May, I did not ask your orders for St. Petersburg. Trust me, I as little contemplated an excursion hither, as at this moment I foresee a voyage to Japan; into which, by the way, I cannot promise that I may not be decoyed by some of the strange navigators and other uninhabitative monsters, from the far east, with whom I have already become acquainted since my be-Muscovitation.

I proceeded, as I then announced to you, with Gustave de Presle, to Baden-Baden which I found, as usual, vulgarized with English, Belgians, and all the other refuse

poured upon our charming frontier, by Rhenish steam navigation. The place is ruined—done for—Paradise lost!—After the close of a week or two, Gustave discovered that he was losing his money, I, my time; without obtaining a particle of enjoyment in return. We started accordingly for Carlsbad; and finding by your letters, forwarded to Töplitz for the announcement of my cousin's marriage, that the new Baron and Baroness, and our pretty Marguerite, were about to visit their forests, I hastened to pay them in person, the united compliments of the house of Vaudreuil; and in return, became so entangled in the meshes of their cordial hospitality, as to have no resource but to follow them a prisoner to St. Petersburg.

Such is the origin of my exploit, and of an omission which you must not persist in treating as an act of neglect, lest I should become careless of your injunction to me to give you the fullest, truest, and most particu-

lar account of the new lord of the Countess Erloff, and the present state of men, women, things, and nothings, in St. Petersburg.

You, who know something of the mode in which the government of this country is carried on, will be pleased to remember that this is no gratuitous task. I am satisfied that my letters are not only perused whenever occasion offers, by the master of this filthy inn, which has the audacity to call itself the first hotel in Petersburg, (my opinion whereof I hereby inscribe for his benefit,) but that they are invariably opened at the post-office. We French are still sufficiently objects of animosity here, to render our correspondence an object of imperial solicitude. However, as my letters to you, *belle tante*, are not quite so urgent in point of punctuality as those of Rothschild, I shall adopt the system of despatching them uniformly through our embassy—the only secure channel of communication.

It is now—let me see—twelve years since, you quitted Russia; and though improvement is naturally more perceptible on the outskirts of civilization than in a capital, representing, like our own, the heart's core of European refinement, do not imagine that the traces of its seven-leagued boots are strikingly evident.

By the first aspect of St. Petersburg, I confess I was startled. So, probably, should I be by that of Paris, were our noble public monuments suddenly to diverge and scatter themselves over thrice the territory on which they are now concentrated; and I was forced to admit that the capital of these savage, tallow-melting Russians, had, in truth, some pretence to the title she arrogates to herself of City of Palaces. But this distinction was nearly as much her own on the day that witnessed the death of the great Catherine, as now;—and it needed only a second glance to discover that the interstitial spaces of

this colossal skeleton of a city, are filled with all that is unsightly and all that is commonplace. The quays and palaces may be of granite; but the houses which at first sight I mistook for stone, are of plastered brick, saving such as are of wood. I found myself gazing upon a Monsieur Jourdain whose ruffles are of point; while the texture and cleanliness of the garment to which they are appended, remain those of the "*bourgeois*" before he pretended to the distinction of "*gentilhomme*." Instead, therefore, of a city of palaces, I inscribed in one of the inner leaves of my pocket-book "City of incongruities."

All this existed in your time. Still, during the reign of the late Emperor, who appears to have made up for all the feminine frivolities of taste wanting in his majestic grandmother, there was, I am assured, such a restless striving after improvement, such a pretence to create a new Versailles in a country, which, for three centuries to come, will not be

ripe for the creation, and which will then, if unwise enough to engender a production so fatal, find it, as we did, a nursery for the elements of destruction to its monarchical institutions,—that, if nothing important was effected, those who witnessed the solitudes of Alexander, can scarcely believe them to have been wholly infructuous.

Now, every thing is changed. Russia pretends only to be Russia. The Muscovites have got a giant of brass, in place of a giant of clay ;—I trust, at least, that Nicholas will prove himself of brass ;—for nothing, I am convinced, but the strong arm and ruthless grasp of despotism, will duly restrain those higher classes, which in this country exhibit all the fatal and ferocious impulses of the people of France. The nobility here is ever in a state of secret ferment. They tormented poor Alexander out of his life. May the present Emperor of all the Bears prove made of sterner stuff!—

At present, *ma belle tante*, St. Petersburg

conveys to me the impression of one of those grand warehouses one suddenly sees start up in our more fashionable quarter of Paris, transferred from the ultra-commercial mart of the Rue St. Denis ; affecting the flashy luxury of modern trade,—plate-glass windows, and counters of polished mahogany,—but retaining the vulgar routine of business of its former fussy, wholesale, quarter of the town.

They still exhibit here, you may remember, the wooden hut in which Peter the Great, father of their savage empire, imbibed the principles of ship-building in the dock-yard of Saardam ; thereby admitting their principles of naval architecture, to be of purely foreign origin. But they are too wise to display the cabinet wherein, equally imported from distant lands, Alexander imbibed those singular constitutional crotchets, which he was desirous to render the formation of a new order of monarchy. I never saw the sovereign who pretended to overstep his century in the civiliza-

tion of his kingdom, who achieved any thing more than a fatal sprain in the effort. Alexander, however, *did* accomplish somewhat more. Having the good fortune to be succeeded by a brother in the full force and vigour of intellect, instead of a feeble minor issued of his loins, the failure of his well-intended efforts served at least to enlighten his successor. Nicholas, accordingly, began by legislating for Russian nature according to the instigations of Russian nature ; instead of according to the Anglo-Gallican and most anomalous Montesquieuism of the imperial disciple of La Harpe, Madame Krudener, and Jeremy Bentham !—He is *par conséquent*, in my humble opinion, the model for a Czar of Muscovy ;—hardy, intrepid, inflexible—gentle in his domestic life, as rigid in his public capacity ;—and is accordingly beloved by his family and adored by his people. I humbly ask pardon of my lovely Polish friends—but so it is !—

You did not, however, require politics at

my hands; but rather some account of the court and the position likely to be maintained there by your daughter and new son-in-law.

As regards the latter, you are so moderately pleased with the match, that it is scarcely possible to speak of Baron von Rehfeld in terms that may not place him higher in your favour. It appears to me, that, in this respect, you render justice neither to him nor your daughter. What was she to do?—Were you not the first to place before her, in stern reality, that among *us*, in our own sordid, or rather impoverished Faubourg, a *Veuve* Erloff was a mere dead letter? In Russia, it seems, her chances of an establishment were equally unpromising. The favour she was enjoying was most precarious; and with the prospect before her of an abyss of poverty, into which at any moment she might be precipitated, carrying with her two children reared in the enjoyment of luxury, I cannot but applaud her self-sacrifice, in accepting the hand of a man whose

fortune, equalling 80,000 francs per annum, is burthened only with one child, and enhanced by diplomatic distinction.

As regards the man attached to the fortune, there is little to be said ; but that little has no drawback from a single offensive particle. Baron von Rehfeld is a bundle of insignificancies :—middle aged,—moderately well-looking,—tolerably well-mannered — sufficiently well-informed—of inoffensive character, and passable abilities. In Paris, one should never have heard mention of his name. At Rehfeld, he is a Baron of the heavens know how many quarterings and descents ;—and at St. Petersburg, minister residentiary from the court of ———.

What would you have more ? The daughter is pretty and pleasing, submissive to the Baroness, and affectionate to Marguerite. For the present, this must suffice you. To enable me to reply to your inquiry in what degree this marriage is likely to influence the favour

hitherto enjoyed by my cousin, I must see and judge the autocratic circle ; where, if report speak truly, our nation enjoys no very high degree of credit. *En attendant, chère tante, je baise très humblement les plus belles mains du monde.*

LETTER V.

FROM IDA VON REHFELD TO MADÉMOISELLE
THERESE MOREAU.

Thanks, *chère bonne*, for such comfortable news of your progressive recovery. Your letters are all I desired. Do not apologize to me for want of news. What news could I possibly expect you to communicate from Schloss Rehfeld?—What could I even wish to know but that you are better and cheerful?

On the eve of my departure, *chère bonne*, you exhorted me, above all things, to mistrust my first impressions of a land of strangers. But this was not enough for wisdom:—you should have first bidden me mistrust my pre-sentiments. You talked to me of the sanguine reliance of youth upon superficial attraction.

Alas! my youth was sufficiently sanguine to have conjectured attractions without limit and without foundation.

I own I flattered myself, for instance, that my position at the Imperial court was to be one of peculiar advantage, as step-daughter to the former Countess Erloff. Judge of my surprise when, on the evening following our arrival here, the Baroness summoned me into her *boudoir*; and addressed me in a confidential tone, with which she never favoured me before, and in which she never, at any time, addresses Marguerite, who, though of my own age, she persists in treating as a child.

“I wish, my dear Ida,” said she, “to afford you a few hints on the subject of the line of conduct to be pursued here: your attention to which may be vitally important to your own prospects, as well as to the interests of your father. You possess the intelligence of a woman; and if placed on the footing of one,

cannot fail to acquire the tact which, in the higher walks of life, is more indispensable than better things. Without it, the greatest talents are unavailable."

Though I thanked her gratefully for so favourable an interpretation of my poor abilities, I foresaw, from so much conciliation, that something disagreeable was to follow.

"The position of our family at the Imperial court," she resumed, "is one of delicacy and difficulty. On all sides, we are objects of jealousy and opposition. I, in the first place, as a French woman naturalized by marriage; your father, in the second, as a foreign minister, united with one supposed to enjoy the favour of the court. By the native nobility, therefore, as well as by the *corps diplomatique*, we are viewed with envious mistrust; while the Imperial family must so far concede to the malevolence of all parties, as to be guarded in their show of favour.

"Such, my dear child, are the disadvantages under which we labour. I am detested by the

mass of society here, as a French woman and a favourite; and [you, as belonging to my family, will consequently be exposed to severe scrutiny. Still, by ascertaining one's precise rights upon society, and neither advancing a step beyond the line nor receding from one's place, it is impossible for even the bitterest insolence to humiliate one's feelings. It is not at court, as in the humbler range of life. At court, every body's position is definite. Your father's diplomatic station is as positively marked out as that of the Emperor, or the archimandrite,—I mean of course the station of your father, as well as that of all belonging to him.

“ This you must try to understand.—Make it your business to know the precise amount of your consequence:—for to aspire to more, would be estimated a vulgar and fatal assumption.—Your social pleasures here, are not, as in your own country, optional.”

Though the Baroness had not paused to

take breath during this long exordium, I admit that the formality of her address inclined me for some such relief. I was beginning to pant under the oppression of duties hitherto unsuspected.

“With Marguerite, matters are less urgent,” she resumed, not seeming to notice my annoyance. “*She* is supported here, by the influence of her father’s connections.”

I almost longed to add, “And by reliance on the brilliant marriage you have projected for her;” but out of regard to my step-sister, forbore.

“Whatever notice the Emperor and Empress may see fit to bestow upon my daughter, will be accepted by the Russian nobility as a compliment to themselves; whereas a favour conceded to the daughter of the representative of one of the lesser powers of Germany, would give universal offence. I explain all this to you, Ida, that you may not misconstrue any preference seemingly accorded to Marguerite.

But you have too much sense to set undue value on such distinctions.

“Had Mademoiselle Thérèse accompanied us hither, according to my expectations, *she* would have explained all such matters to you more circumstantially than the little leisure I can enjoy at St. Petersburg enables me to do.

“However, I see that you understand me, and will be good and prudent. Like other and greater politicians, we must *reculer pour mieux sauter*; and, perhaps, when all the intriguers about the court have satisfied themselves, that I ground no pretensions as Baron von Rehfeld's wife, upon the favour enjoyed as widow of Count Erloff, I may be permitted to withdraw you from the back ground, to which, in the beginning, I fear you are condemned.”

By a kiss on the forehead, the Baroness now dismissed me from an audience which seemed intended as a prelude to my disenchantments. For lo, as if at the command of some

adverse genius, in a fairy-tale, a hedge of thorn seemed to have suddenly started out of the ground, to conceal the bright palace of pleasure on which my eyes had so long been fixed with delight and expectation !

The following day, my attention having been thus startled to the task of observation, I was surprised to find a thousand petty vexations upspringing at every turn. No more free discussions—no lively sallies, as at Rehfeld !—Every gay allusion seemed interdicted—every opinion subjected to rule. If I may form inferences from the reiterated cautions of the Baroness, the domestic servants here must be a legion of spies. You can imagine nothing more servile than the state of caution to which even Marguerite and myself are subjected in this respect.

It is not alone that I am required, on receiving a buffet on the cheek from the insolence of Muscovite barbarism, to turn the other with a request for a repetition of the

favour, but I am positively interdicted the expression of a single free opinion ; and Marguerite assures me that in the higher circles of St. Petersburg, it is a matter of *bon ton* to have no opinion on any subject more open to political interpretation than the weather.

Already, I am beginning to find my language confused, and my ideas contracting, *chère bonne*, under the influence of this wretched depression. In Germany, I used to consider Nicholas I. a human being, or at most, an Emperor. *Here*, he has suddenly expanded, in my mind, into a mysterious influence—a supernatural intelligence—an all but supreme being. But alas ! it is forbidden, even in my letters, to talk of this ! Adieu, then, for the present. My next shall treat of safer subjects. I will try to describe the magnificent palaces of St. Petersburg—if indeed it be promissible to allude to so much as the plumage of this imperial eagle whose beak and claws are so redoubtable.—Adieu !

LETTER VI.

FROM THE BARON VON REHFELD TO
WILHELM VON REHFELD.

I promised you, my dear nephew, that on my arrival at Petersburg, I would reply to the request you urged at the Residenz, that I should solicit of the Grand Duke your appointment as attaché to the Legation, in the event of receiving your mother's sanction to spending the winter in Russia.

On mature consideration, I find that this would be more difficult of accomplishment than I surmised. A single attaché is allowed me; and it would be as impossible for me to supersede the services of young Hohenthal, as to dismiss August von Collin, who, from the period of my own appointment, has officiated as my private secretary.

Under these circumstances, I should recom-

mend you to suspend, for the present, your projected tour. The court of St. Petersburg is unlike all other European courts. A sufficient motive seems to be demanded from all those who present themselves as mere travellers, yet prolong their sojourn beyond the usual limits of curiosity. Amateur tourists cannot sojourn here, as in Italy, for the benefit of the climate,—as in Paris, for social enjoyment,—or as in London, for the study of its institutions or the improvement of their stables. Should you, as you desire, attempt a prolonged residence in St. Petersburg, it would be imagined either that your marriage with my daughter was on the eve of accomplishment, or that you had some other inostensible inducement.

As regards the former plea, you seem fully to coincide in my opinion that it is desirable for Ida, as well as yourself, to have seen something of the world previous to any ratification of our vague projects on the subject.

In a word, my dear Wilhelm, I advise you

to postpone your journey hither. Our friend, Grünglatz, has written to me, proposing a visit to this capital. But I am equally of opinion, that he would find it more advantageous to examine St. Petersburg during the summer season; when the public collections will be more accessible, and his practical pursuits as a naturalist obtain happier facilities. Tell him, therefore, with a thousand compliments from myself and my family, that I cannot recommend so long a journey to either of you, at this inclement season.

Nothing, on the other hand, can be more charming than a Russian summer, which may be regarded as a long day—the darkest night scarcely exceeding the twilight of other countries. The Neva, which, with its endless varieties of shipping, constitutes the boast of the city, is then in its glory, imparting to St. Petersburg the air of a modernized Venice; but the beautiful villas on its banks, the rich galleys, the populous quays, are lost, as objects of attraction, during the continuance of the frost.

In May, therefore, previous to our departure for the seat of the Baroness in the environs of Tzarsko-çélo, I shall hope to see you. Meantime, it will afford me sincere pleasure to hear of your welfare.

Present the compliments of the New Year in my name and that of my family, to your excellent mother ; and on no account omit the transmission of my message to my friend Grün-glatz.

LETTER VII.

FROM COUNT ALFRED DE VAUDREUIL TO
COUNT JULES.

How often, my dear brother, have we exploded with rage, on perusing together, in the tedious work of some foreign traveller, impertinencies levelled at our national manners, habits, and opinions.

Our indignation was a proof, only, of the circumscription of our experience. The further I travel, the more I become disgusted with objects and usages that impose themselves upon the world under the name of French. When I reflect upon the loathsome dinners palmed on me in St. Petersburg as dressed by the "famous French cook," of Prince Astrapouschapovitch, or the half-denuded women, glowing with paint, pointed out to me as charming, because attired *à la Française* and

receiving their dresses from Paris, I cannot wonder at the disapproval expressed by foreigners less versed than myself in the truth of such matters.

The Frenchness of St. Petersburg is, at best, the Frenchness of a century ago. All the sins of which we have repented and all the frippery we have rejected, appear to have been transferred to this place. In *our* time, rouge and pearl powder have been confined to the stage. In *our* time, dinners have been prepared for the palate, and not for the eye. Decorated dishes and faded faces, scarcity of drapery and bold flirtation, are, heaven be thanked, as utterly unknown in our society, as they ought to be throughout the civilized confederacy.

How can one wonder, therefore, that Nicholas should entertain anti-Gallican prejudices; or that he should cherish a pleasanter impression of England, which he visited *en prince*, and has studied *en philosophe*?—For my part, I

freely forgive him. I should myself abhor a France, *jeune ou ancienne*, such as the one of which he obtains specimens.. Few among the persons worth knowing among us, are rich enough to travel ; whereas, year after year, the English yachts and steamers are wafting knights of the garter and lovely marchionesses over the Baltic, to show his Imperial Majesty that the land which he admired so much “when George the Third was king,” and Nicholas a *cadet de famille*, (which, even when the family is imperial, is no such mighty affair), has lost nothing of its good sense and dignified pragmatism, under three succeeding reigns.

It is too much to expect of a hyperborean understanding, to comprehend that, howbeit, the revolutionists of '89 have left successors in Napoleonized and re-Bourbonized France, fully capable of engendering a second revolution—a revolution of mere opinion, the *ancien régime* was not so thoroughly extinguished as not to have legitimate successors, as distinct

from the rest, as the blue waters of the Rhone from the lake they traverse. However, if the ignorance of the Muscovites render them indulgent towards *me*, MY pity of their ignorance, renders me indulgent towards *them*; and I consequently accept their antipathy to the French as directed exclusively against a race of people, as odious to *me* as to themselves.

Du reste, regarding, as I do, the nobler order of the ladies of Russia, more especially Russianized Poland, as the representatives of the Versailles of Louis XV., I admit that, except as models of superficial taste, they are charming creatures. Impossible to imagine any thing more diverting! Such over-acted vivacity — such prodigious *migraines* — such spasmodic *maux de nerfs*! One fancies the days of the Parabère, the du Prie—nay, even the Dubarri, come again; though, by the way, I have heard that the latter was so admirably schooled by our cousin of Brissac, as to have

been mistakable in her latter days, for as high-bred gentlewoman as the rest.

I am, perhaps, hasty, in pronouncing sentence on the lovely Muscovites, for I can judge only of those who have received me into their houses with open arms; while the more courtly set are difficult of access to foreigners, even to those who present themselves with the letters of introduction which I have not been at the trouble to procure.

My pretty Ida, by the way, is already detested by these women; which I take to be a guarantee of her perfect *succès* in general society. I have seen less of her than I expected; less perhaps than I intended. But in a new society, one is obliged to be assiduous in certain ceremonies of politeness, such as one afterwards permits oneself to neglect; and I have accordingly massacred myself with the formality of returning visits and accepting invitations, which henceforward may look for my services in vain.

It is perhaps because resentful of my neglect, that the flaxen idol of my soul looks somewhat cold upon the devotions I am beginning to renew. In her father's old barn of a château, she was uniformly lovely and *aimable*. Here, with a thousand incentives to mirth, (for we are surrounded by the quizzible in all its branches,) the poor girl appears miserably out of spirits. The Baroness whispers to me, that this arises from wounded self-consequence; that the Lily of Rehfeld expected to be the Lily of St. Petersburg; and that the notice bestowed upon her by the little show-box puppet-court of the Residenz, had induced her to anticipate a flourish of trumpets in her honour, in presence of all the Russias.

Poor child!—How much have people to answer for who rear their children in such seclusion and ignorance of the world, as to cultivate their egotism into this giant growth! I must take her in hand again;—though, per-

haps, too much notice on my part might encourage rather than check the progress of the evil.

It might be more to Mademoiselle von Rehfeld's advantage, were I to devote some attention for a time to poor Marguerite, whose attractions she is apt to undervalue ; and who, but that a portionless cousin is an unsafe object of civility, is really a charming creature ; uniform in temper, gentle in deportment, obliging in character, all that might be expected from the *élève* of our charming old aunt ; by which I mean, according to *her* notions of education, a girl brought up in conventual subjection, with whom the Countess never exchanged a dozen sentences during the dozen years she was committed to her charge. Marguerite Erloff will consequently make a pattern for wives. Were she rich, in addition to her personal merits, I would recommend her, my dear Jules, to you ; from which hint, be pleased to infer that, with all my volatility and *inconsé-*

quence, I have not yet renounced the anti-matrimonial principles becoming a younger brother.

Do not repeat a syllable of this to our dear aunt; or I should be having her despatch a volume of warnings and remonstrances to Madame von Rehfeld assuring her I am in love with her daughter; an amiable weakness of which, believe me, I am incapable.

Farewell, my dear Jules.—News, news, news, I beseech you!—Ovid in exile among the Goths, implores you for an authentic word or two touching those important matters in which Gazetteers are not to be trusted. Give me scandal and the Opera;—any thing you please, but politics!—I only wish I had scandal and an Opera here, to furnish me with subjects for my correspondence in return.—*A tous les Dieux.*

LETTER VIII.

FROM MARGURITE ERLOFF TO MADEMOISELLE THERESE MOREAU.

Though apprehensive of exciting your uneasiness, dear Mademoiselle Thérèse, I cannot but risk an inquiry relative to our dear Ida, which you alone can answer. Have I displeased her—or are her reserve and low spirits attributable only to absence from her home and country? It is natural, I admit, that, separated from you, her friend, as well as from her good Sara, her poor heart should droop. Still, she anticipated so much delight from her expedition to Russia, and even throughout our journey, was so elated, that I cannot but ascribe her sudden depression either to illness or some just cause of displeasure.

Illness, however, it cannot surely be, for never did I see her more blooming; nor can

you well imagine the admiration and envy excited among our pallid beauties of St. Petersburg, by Ida's radiant complexion.

To mama, I dare not even suggest the origin of my uneasiness, lest she should imagine my step-sister discontented with the efforts made to please her; while as to the Baron, I stand so much in awe of him, as never yet to have hazarded an attempt at familiar conversation.

My cousin Alfred, who is not enamoured of Russia in any point of view, assures me that Ida's dulness is the result of our abominable climate; and that, by noticing her *ennui*, I shall only augment the evil. I have, therefore, renounced every attempt at condolence; and presume to apply to yourself to know whether I have been so unfortunate as to offend her, or whether you can suggest any means by which I might cheer or enliven the life I would fain render happiest of the happy.

I am the more mortified at witnessing her

melancholy, because, for my own part, I have not a wish ungratified. My brother will be here in a few weeks; and our little home circle, to which the company of dearest Ida and my cousin Alfred have imparted a charm that renders me indifferent to the gay circles in which we are beginning to take our share, is to be increased to-morrow by the arrival of Prince Gallitzin; who, as one of the friends of my late father, is on the most intimate footing at our house. I need not enlarge upon his merit, for he used to be a great favourite of yours at Schloss Rehfeld.

By the way, it may amuse you to learn that already, Ida has an admirer;—at least we can assign no other motive than admiration of my step-sister to the half-sullen pertinacity with which a certain English milord, named Elvinston, constantly renews his visits, though apparently tortured by every effort we make to lead him into conversation. He was first presented by my cousin Alfred, who, through the

introduction of the French Embassy, is well acquainted with the English *attachés* ; and comes here once or twice a week to sit on the edge of his chair, blush scarlet at every word addressed to him by my mother, and at the end of an hour, scramble out of the room, after an attempt to take leave much as if he had been committing a crime instead of fulfilling a ceremony.

Count Alfred declares that Lord Elvinston is an excellent fellow and a man of sense, who has acquired the air of a blockhead from never having learned to dance. But Ida, after one or two attempts to amuse herself by laughing at him, tells me she has given him up, as game too tame to be worth running down ; and he is consequently left for me to entertain—a duty which I execute by allowing him to notice my efforts by vague replies, while his eyes remain steadily fixed upon Mademoiselle von Rehfeld.

My dear sister seems surprised to find the

little consequence assigned here to unmarried girls,—a thing my Paris education had of course prepared me to expect. In Germany, unless at the larger courts, it seems, a certain domesticity of manners and habits, converts society into an extended family circle; and poor girls are not exempted as with *you* and *us*, from the tedious ceremonial of life, till qualified by their marriage to take part in the pageant. Perhaps this system, which conveys at first an appearance of personal slight, may have some share in depressing the spirits of my sister. Yet surely she ought rather to rejoice that for a time we are free from the labour of representation, which she constantly hears my mother declare to be the most cruel *corvée* in the world.

For my own share, I know, there never passes a day in which I do not bless my stars for having escaped the misfortune at one moment anticipated by mamma, of my appointment as

maid of honour to the Empress. Though this constitutes a mere grade of honour, and the number of them sometimes amounts to eighty, I trembled at the idea of the representation it would entail upon me; nor shall I ever forget the agony of my presentation to the Emperor, though a private one, to return thanks for the continuance of our pension re-accorded on my mother's marriage, previous to our departure for Germany. Though the Emperor is strikingly handsome, there is something stern and imposing in his air, which caused my blood to curdle. As to the Empress—but, I seem to forget that this is to *me* an interdicted subject.

We are all going to-night to a ball given by your rich and stately ambassador, the Duc de Mortémart; and my cousin Alfred keeps assuring Ida that, at length, she is sure of a *fête* deserving the name. We have beautiful new dresses for the occasion, and it is to be

one of the triumphs of the Carnival. Ida will give you an account of its splendours, which, I trust, may fully realize my cousin Alfred's prediction.

Farewell, dear friend. Do not, I entreat, forget to reply fully and candidly to my rash interrogations.

LETTER IX.

FROM VISCOUNT ELVINSTON TO SIR HENRY
MAITLAND, BART., LONDON.

You complain, my dear Sir, that my letters have given you a less explicit account of my pursuits in Petersburg, than those I addressed to you from Stockholm of my occupations in Sweden. Believe me, this is unintentional. The week following my arrival here, the winter season set in. The freezing of the Neva gives the signal for the cessation of all out-of-door pleasures; and to waste time so precious as yours in empty details of fêtes and entertainments, is a liberty I should not have attempted, but that your letters seem to accuse me of either laziness or reserve.

I must, therefore, afford you by my wretched attempts at description, a less accurate account of this place than you have derived from better

authorities ; more particularly from the account given us by George Maitland, who having visited St. Petersburg in the summer season, amused us with a more flattering picture of its beauties and splendours than I am able to confirm. Most cities are more advantageously viewed in summer, by such travellers as prefer the aspect of nature and of a new people, to courtly pageantry, which I suppose is pretty nearly the same in all civilized countries. But St. Petersburg above all ;—so much of its local attraction being derived from the noble river which affords greater varieties of water-scape than our own Thames, the Bay of Naples, and Lagunes of Venice, united ; and which, throughout the winter months, is reduced to the cheerless aspect of a snowy plain. The very palaces on the quays, which in some places present a fine architectural façade, nearly a mile in extent, forfeit half their grandeur when deprived of this vivifying fore-ground.

To an eye accustomed to the metropolitan

vivacity of London or Paris, St. Petersburg presents the appearance of the outline of a great city, still waiting to be filled up; and the name of "Palmyra of the North," sometimes conceded to this place, would, in my opinion, be aptly exchanged for that of Washington the Great. Proportioned in design rather to the magnitude of the empire whereof it forms the seat of government, than to the wants of the population, it extends, as you have probably heard, so far beyond the demands of its half million of inhabitants, as to apportion at the rate of twelve hundred square feet to every man, woman, and child within its limits. This prodigality of space, considering the nature and cost of a purely artificial soil, raised on piles in the delta of the Neva as that of Venice on the Lagoon, appears a singular oversight. Centuries will scarcely suffice to complete the city so boldly sketched, a century ago, by Peter the Great, on the extreme edge of an empire of which his martial

successors have since so mightily extended the frontier. It will be some time, I suspect, before the Swedes again take the Muscovite by the beard within reach of the citadel of his capital, as was the case when Peter was constructing his superfluous metropolis.

Were I personally interested in the prosperity of the place, it would afford me, I own, endless vexation, that the said great founder should not have selected a more prosperous site than a swamp, where the foundations of every house cost as much as the superstructure; and where the prevalence of a westerly wind, at the moment of the breaking up of the winter frost, would inevitably produce an inundation, capable of sweeping the city from its precarious footing. This great capital, which rose as it were with the growth of Jonah's gourd, is equally susceptible of being as rapidly cut down and withered.

In the mean while, even while solid and prosperous as her subterranean forest of piles

will admit, the flatness of the site is fatal to picturesque effect. In spite of the grandeur of the public buildings, nothing can be more monotonous than the winter aspect of the city. From the prodigality of space, the houses appear low in proportion to their extent, exhibiting half the number of stories usual in Paris or Vienna; while a certain haziness of atmosphere deprives the long perspective of the streets of every thing like dignity or grandeur. It sounds well in foreign countries, that the equipages of people of condition never appear in the streets of St. Petersburg without four horses. But in this straggling city, in streets half lighted by night, and by day presenting only a dingy waste of beaten snow, these equipages produce not half the effect of a well appointed London chariot and pair.

Pedestrian pleasures, on the other hand, are out of the question. The severity of the weather, at this season, renders them as much a matter of danger, as the laws of *bon ton* a

matter of indecorum. The Emperor is the only man bold enough to defy both. Our English nursery Christmas proverb, "if you go out, Jack Frost will lay hold of your nose," is here no fiction; and as the sufferer is himself often rendered unconscious by the general numbness of his features when exposed to the atmosphere, of the misfortune that has befallen him, it is not uncommon to be stopped by a stranger in the street, and quietly informed that your nose is frozen; an evil which you must remedy by rubbing it with snow ere it be too late. You will readily believe, therefore, that I, who account myself so good a walker, have renounced my pedestrian pleasures till a more convenient season; though Nicholas, acclimatized by nature and second nature, appears constantly on the parade in uniform, without a pelisse or cloak, as well as on foot and in an open sledge in the public promenades.

You have heard George Maitland assign a decided preference to that grand thoroughfare

of St. Petersburg, the Nevskoï Prospekt, over our Regent Street; and the Admiralty quay here, to that of the Louvre. I know not how this may be in the summer season, when one can take leisure to enjoy the gay aspect of the shops, and the wooden pavement is disencumbered of its dull snow or filthy subsequent mud, while the Neva ripples gaily in its channel, crowded with an endless variety of craft. But at present, I must confess, I give the preference to streets where one pauses, if the expression may be allowed, without the fear of losing one's nose before one's eyes; and to a city where one is not dependent for transit upon the precarious aid of bridges of boats, which, at certain epochs of the year, in consequence of the freezing or thawing of the river, are of necessity constructed and re-constructed several times in the course of the day; and at others, are for days together wholly wanting. It is said that the money spent in making and unmaking the Izaak's Bridge, would have

sufficed to form one of stone as fine as that of Waterloo.

I will not trouble you with a further description for the present. All I have to tell of the really palatial palaces of the Tzar, may keep for some future occasion ; for you will be anxious for a reply to your inquiries concerning the society with which I chiefly pass my time.

You have often suggested to me, my dear Sir, that in foreign countries, the diplomatic society is likely to prove the most advantageous ; as concentrating all that is distinguished by birth, breeding, or ability, of the united Europe. That it is the most amusing, I fully grant ; though one should gain, I fear, but an imperfect insight into the society of a country, more especially such a country as this, by taking, as a fair sample, the Russian Ambassadors in foreign countries, or associating here only with this privileged class of foreigners.

But since my object in spending a portion

of the winter here, is not to write a book upon the present state of Russia, or even to form a severely accurate notion of its resources and progress for the embellishment of some future speech in parliament, but simply to enjoy a somewhat less turbulent carnival than at Paris last year, and a less costly season than the preceding winter at Melton, for which you, my dear guardian, have sentenced me to a year's prudence and penitence, I have permitted myself, under your sanction, to enjoy all the pleasures derivable from the hospitalities of the Duc de Mortémart and the other foreign ministers, for whom you were so obliging as to forward me letters of recommendation.

The Duke more especially, has one of the pleasantest houses in St. Petersburg. But there, as in our own embassy, there are no companions of my own age, except the *attachés*, who are absorbed in their own pursuits; whereas in one or two others of a less brilliant

nature, I find young people inclined to be sociable, in alternation with the graver associates you advise me to cultivate.

Among these, the family of the —— minister, possesses peculiar attractions for me; as the daughter of Madame von Rehfeld, by her former marriage with a Russian General, speaks English like a native. The aptitude of the Russians for the acquirement of foreign languages has been too often cited to need my testimony. But since my domestication here, I have been less surprised at the fluency with which, in other countries, I have found them speaking the idiom of the place. From their infancy, this is made an especial object of education. The same spirit which induced Peter to bring boat-builders from Holland, and Catherine, *savans* from France, to assist in the organization of their new empire, has suggested to their subjects the wisdom of promoting national intercourse with more polished nations, by the cultivation of foreign

languages ; and English nursery-maids, French governesses, and German tutors, are to be found in every Russian family of distinction.

Even in the public institution of the Foundling Hospital, (which, as you are aware has here a foundation so opulent, that its revenue would pay the interest of our National debt), promotes this object so strenuously, that the pupils, on quitting the establishment to earn their livelihood, are without exception, versed in three or four modern languages.

That the daughter of Madame von Rehfeld should be so good an English scholar is the more surprising, because twelve months only have elapsed since her return from Paris, where she resided many years for her education with her maternal relations the Vaudreuils, a family with whom I became well acquainted last year. But I conclude that the early lessons of her English nurse were too deeply

implanted on "the soft wax of an infant's memory," to be obliterated even by long-sojourn in the anti-Anglican and anti-philological Faubourg St. Germain ;—the French being, Heaven knows, as remarkable for their incapacity as linguists, as the Russians for a contrary facility.

It is true, the Parisians make a national boast of their exclusive devotion to their own "perfect and universal language;" and are not a little proud of its having been so long adopted in Russia for purposes of state, and remaining the fashionable dialect for purposes of society. Even the noble monument erected to the memory of his troops, at the close of the late war, by the Emperor Alexander, bears the inscription "*à mes braves compagnons d'armes.*"

Unless I am much mistaken, however, the present Emperor will employ the full force of his somewhat arbitrary will, in nationalizing the people, whom his ancestors could only

concentrate into a nation by assimilation and sympathy with those of other countries. It is now time to reproduce the elements of a whole, whose amalgamation and entirety was the first object of its legislators.

With the exception of the Rehfelds, there is scarcely a family with which I am on terms of intimacy ; but in their circle, I find an amusing variety ; the mother being French, the daughter Russian, the husband and his daughter, German ; and by one of the family, at least, my native tongue is spoken in perfection, the greatest attraction, perhaps, of all. In a few weeks, their circle will receive an addition in Count Alexis Erloff, the son of Madame von Rehfeld, an officer in the Izmaeloffsky regiment of guards ; who, Mademoiselle Erloff assures me, is a far better English scholar than herself. Young Erloff received his education, I find, at the cost of the Emperor, at the Hôtel des Pages, or noble Military College of St. Petersburg.

A circumstance which, were I of Muscovite origin, I should find more mortifying than the popularity of the French tongue, is the undeniable obligation of the "Northern Palmyra," to foreign architects, sculptors, and painters. The magnificent palaces in which the Russians pride themselves, their public institutions, their national foundations, are the works of the French, Italians, Germans, or English. It is true that the results of the system of public education founded by Catherine II, are only now coming into play; pending which their fine churches, and academies, their hospitals, and Botanical Garden, their Museums and Galleries, constitute a debt of gratitude to Western and Northern Europe, which it will require centuries to repay.

I fear, my dear Sir, that, instead of renewing your complaint of the brevity of my letters, you will now exclaim against my garrulity. One word from you will be a sufficient check

to my communicative vein ; but if I do not receive some such warning, I shall probably bore you in my next with a few observations on the domestic life of the city of the Tzar.

I have the honour to be

Your affectionate ward,

ELVINSTON.

LETTER X.

FROM COUNT ALFRED DE VAUDREUIL TO
THE COUNTESS AUGUSTE IN PARIS.

You were quite right, *chère tante*, in your surmise that the former intermarriage of my cousin with a Russian noble, as well as my intimacy with the Mortémarts would supersede all necessity for letters of introduction. I am now perfectly established here—more so by the way, than your Teutonic son-in-law. The corps diplomatique is less in favour at the Imperial court than at any other, I should imagine, unless that of Pekin. The policy of the Russian cabinet, if in reality that of stratagem, is ostensibly that of open defiance. Though probably the most astucious in Europe, their tone of braggartry necessitates singular neglect of the inter-negotiators of their foreign policy; and the ambassadors are

frequently omitted from the list of invited to the private fêtes of the court. But this, I suspect, is part of the nationalizing system of Nicholas. In your time, probably, a different order of things may have prevailed, for Alexander affected to be a liberal. The liberalism of an autocrat of Russia!—

In one respect, matters are unchanged: the worthy Muscovites are still the most military of bellicose nations. From the time when Peter the Great founded their city with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other, and was compelled to institute military rank as a matter of precedence, because chivalric distinctions could not be suddenly summoned out of the waters of the Neva, like frigates or palaces—to be a soldier appears to have been as great a thing in St. Petersburg, as in London to be a lord, or in Paris a gentleman and a man of genius.

I experienced of course, *chère tante*, a pre-sentiment of general retardation, moral and

physical, on consenting to waste a portion of my days among people who allow their calendar to be burthened by the twelve additional days which Father Time has gradually slung, like mill-stones, round the neck of the year ;—the obstinacy with which these people adhere to the Gregorian style, compelling all other manufacturers of state papers to brand the Russian Protocols with the infamous letters of O. S., is as disgraceful in my humble opinion, to a nation, as those of T. V. to an individual.

But I did not suppose that Muscovite man, in his progress towards civilized man, would have stopped so short by the way, as still to be as much indebted to providence for his resources against the rigour of the climate, as the bears and wolves of his desarts. Oh ! the foulness of the unshorn population ; oh ! those worse than bestial beards, which, when anointed with the green oil of a piroga or reeking with the cabbage soup, the villainous

shtshi which forms, I conclude, from my own observations, the daily bread prayed for in the paternosters of the populace, exude a savour beyond that of a southern synagogue in the dog days!—There is some pretext perhaps for these hirsute propensities in the aborigines of the Don and Wolga. But since the savages pretend to a civilized capital, why not at least respect the nostrils of civilization?—

My poor faithful Clément, who hungereth grievously after the *restaurants* of the Palais Royal or the *cuisine* of the Hôtel de Vaudreuil, assures me that, at the hay market or Sinnaia Ploshtshod, where the peasants dispose of their frozen flocks and herds, nothing can be more horrific than the brigade of ghastly cattle drawn up in array, life like, and seeming to mock the spectator with the glare of their glassy eye balls. When sawn in portions for retail trade, the *gamin* class qualified as the Tshornoi Narod, (or black people,) rush in to contend for the saw-dust; and St. Petersburg may

thus boast of favouring the children of clay with two other original and peculiar species of dust ; *i. e.* the flesh-dust scrambled for in the market, and the snow-dust that blinds one in the streets.

This domestic revelation of my friend Clément, addresses itself, by the way, to your excellent *femme de confiance* ; who will be right proud at hearing the travellers' wonders of her son, from the lips of his lady. Tell her also from me, that his master is as eager as himself to behold once more one of the bright wood fires, and vintage nearly as bright, of our beloved Burgundy. What possible excuse, dearest aunt, have we French, for ever setting foot out of our own glorious country ?

You are eager for an account of your grandson, whom you have not seen, I find, since he was as high as the table on which I am writing. Alexis is not yet here ; but I have heard him well-spoken of among the Benkendorfs, Narischkins, Nesselrodes, Strogonoffs, and others

whose praise is distinction. Madame von Rehfeld appears to regret that he should be so essentially Russian, as scarcely to appear of your race. But let her restrict her prejudices to our fair and gentle Marguerite. "*Soyons de notre pays*," is an axiom for men, all over the world. Those who wish Alexis Erloff to prosper in life, that is in Russia, where his life is to pass, must suffer him to forget the Vaudreuil blood intermingling in his veins, in order that others may become equally oblivious. The time is past for foreigners to prosper here. The national mind is throwing off its leading strings ; and even another Alexander, of whom St. Izaak be praised, I see no prospect—would scarcely secure toleration for another Capo d'Istrias. Let Alexis, therefore, be Russian to his finger tips, or rather to his boot tips ; for his vocation, I find, is essentially military. May he turn out another Souvaroff or Kutusoff, or any thing else most *off* or *skoi* in the Russian Empire !

For Marguerite, I find, happy destinies are

preparing. Madame von Rehfeld seems assured of her marriage with Sergius Gallitzin; a man of considerable merit, some influence, and mature age. You may still chance to see her established as ambassadress in that charming hotel of the Champs Elysées, where Grimod de la Reynière wrote and ate, and where Pozzo writes and causes others to eat, so much more exquisitely than any other scribbler of protocols or giver of dinners.

Gallitzin has lately arrived from Vienna; where it is supposed he was sent on a secret mission, taking Rehfeld by the way, as a pretext for his expedition into Germany. I know not whether we do too much or too little honour to the Muscovite cabinet; but I have noticed that we never allow Nesselrode to sneeze, without feeling convinced that a correspondent sneeze telegraphs his good understanding with Metternich. These twain form, as it were, the two closing links of the iron chain of European monarchy. The day

they cease to sneeze in unison, legitimacy will have to rue !

Meanwhile, whatever may have been Galitzin's motives for playing billiards and slaying wild boar a dull fortnight at Rehfeld, it is generally considered that there is a tenderer origin for his daily visits to the "HOTEL OF THE * * LEGATION," (if you could only hear the mouthful our good Baron makes of it ! the Constantinopolitanische Dudelsack's Pfeiffer wherewith my old German master, Klinkerfus, used to dislocate my jaws by way of exercise, was slight by comparison !) But I leave it to the dear Baroness to explain her maternal policy ; trusting it may find as much sympathy, *bellé tante*, in the Hotel de Vaudreuil, as exists in the telegraphic sneezes of the privy councils of the Danube and Neva.

LETTER X.

FROM IDA VON REHFELD TO MADEMOISELLE
THERESE MOREAU.

You have had a relapse, then, *chère bonne*? How could you be so incautious as trust yourself to the arm of the worthy pastor; whose guidance in the ways of this world, is alas! so much less to be relied on, than in the paths of peace?—Had I known before hand of your intention to quit your chamber, I should have warned you against the aid of so inefficient a cavalier.

Very often do I wish that it was *my* arm you had to lean upon; and that my father had left me behind at Schloss Rehfeld, as in the former instance! Travel in a foreign country, on an independent footing, may be a charming thing. But a compulsory sojourn among strangers, be your distastes what they may, invalidates all

the attraction one might otherwise find in the novelty of the scene. A diplomatic situation, high or low, is always slavery; splendid slavery, if high—petty slavery, if low. My father's, alas, is only a petty one; a very diminutive appanage to the triumphal car of Muscovite domination; and of necessity, *I* am but a shred of his garment. Far better, *chère bonne*, be one's own mistress at home! Rather sink under the leaden weight of *ennui*, than be pricked to death with pins' points—pins' points, moreover, of brass or copper, not of precious metal!—I am almost beginning to understand the charm that Marguerite Erloff discerned in Schloss Rehfeld. It was, at least, independence as regards choice of time and place.

Frank as I was with you concerning my rash desire for change, let me be equally candid in avowing my remorse. I was wrong to extend my desires beyond my native Germany. At Rehfeld, even at the Residenz, I had a definite position. Here, I am an equivocal nothing,

who must not aspire to become something, lest somebody should take offence. When we read together in the old library at Rehfeld portions of the memoirs of De Retz and Madame de Motteville, St. Simon or Dangeau, so indistinct were my notions of the nature of courtiership, that the books you had announced to me as so entertaining, failed to amuse me. Now, I am beginning to understand and dread this epidemy of palaces ! I could laugh now, with Madame de Motteville—or *at* her ;—or rather weep—for what more deserving pity than such miserable self-abasement ?

I can scarcely describe to you, *chère bonne*, the singular effect produced in my feelings by perceiving the Baroness, so frank and free at Rehfeld, become suddenly paralyzed on setting foot in St. Petersburg. I protest to you, that on crossing the frontier, her very faculties were cramped and arrested, as if frost-bitten ; and to a degree far beyond the remedy of rubbing her mind with snow, by way of restorative.

Nor is she the only example. Since I began to exercise my new-found powers of observation, I have noticed people with thousands, nay, hundreds of thousands of serfs nearly as much at their disposal as their hares and rabbits, people who eat on gold, and walk on lapis lazuli—people who, when they want to change the furniture of their palaces, send to Italy and buy a gallery of chef-d'œuvres, or to the royal Gobelins for their hangings—I have seen these magnificos cringe and crouch under the influence of an Imperial frown! Under such circumstances, I do not wonder it should have been found necessary to compel the rich Russians to reside in their native country, by confiscating their estates after more than five years absenteeism. Nothing short of the penalty of destitution would compel me to abide in a city where an *isvoshtshik* on his hackney coach-stand is as much his own master as a noble in his palace; and where the *butshnik* in the street, exercises no severer police

over vagrants, than one chamberlain over another.

Count Alfred de Vaudreuil assured me the other night, as we were standing together at the ball of the Duc de Mortémart, (and it is not every where, or with every one, conversation on such a subject would be safe,) that scarcely a Russian of high fortune or degree permitted to reside at any foreign court, but earns his license dearly as regards his feelings and conscience, by a correspondance with home, rendering him little short of a spy upon the nakedness of the land in which he is accepting hospitality. Is not this revolting?—Is not this a cruel counterbalance to the noble system of the Imperial government of entertaining an ex-political mission in the great cities of Europe, for the study of their institutions, arts, sciences, literature and manufactures; which has always appeared to me the sublime of legislative munificence.

But I am talking to you of Russia, *chère bonne*, when you assure me that you wish me to talk only of myself. Yet how treat of myself, my prospects—my interests—my happiness, without affording you some insight into the habits of those among whom I live, and habits so uncongenial with our own?

Our little circle has derived an addition from the return of Prince Gallitzin ; who is scarcely less familiar among us here than when domesticated at Schloss Rehfeld. I am almost ashamed to own to you that, on meeting him again, I found my ideas of his merits singularly developed by hearing him constantly alluded to in St. Petersburg, as “a favourite of the Emperor.” On his arrival in Germany, I regarded him as a cold old man of more than my father’s years, a person in whom it was impossible for me to feel the slightest interest. Here, I detect myself listening eagerly to every word that falls from his lips, as though affording indications of imperial will or caprice !

Not that *many* fall from his lips! The Prince is habitually taciturn: and I am convinced that he and my father might spend a month tête-à-tête, without the effusion of a phrase a week, between the two. It is, therefore, the more singular to me that he can endure, as he does, nay take pleasure as he does, in the society of Count Alfred, whom he is pretty sure to find here; and who is the only person into whom the atmosphere of St. Petersburg has infused no caution. Monsieur de Vaudreuil rattles on as wildly here as he did at Rehfeld. It may be on that very account Prince Gallitzin likes his company; being sure to hear from *him* opinions floating in society, which native Russians would bite their tongues off, rather than hazard in presence of an imperial favourite.

Perhaps, however, I am mistaken; for it is only natural the Prince should frequent my father's house, considering the matrimonial projects of the Baroness for Marguerite.

Chère bonne, you have heard it seems of my strange conquest! Marguerite tells me her letters have introduced Lord Elvinston to your acquaintance; a man who looks as if he had been taken to pieces and put together by an unskilful workman, so little do his limbs seem to belong to his body, or his features to his face. Never did one see so awkward a being, or one so tortured by *mauvaise honte*! With birth, fortune, and information to recommend him in society, he has the air of a malefactor. I am not sure, however, that I do not prefer his left-handedness and left-leggedness to the self-possessed provinciality of my cousin Wilhelm, who is not so much as sensible of his own manifold deficiencies.

There are a few other Englishmen in society here—one or two attached to their embassy; but only this solitary *I-say-kee* by way of traveller. They usually invade these northern latitudes in the summer season; which, in St. Petersburg, is said to constitute a single day,

and lovely, in proportion to its brevity ;—the flowers never losing their distinctness of colour, nor the birds retiring to roost.

There are many English merchants, I fancy settled here. But the line of demarcation between commerce and arms (which in Russia almost constitute nobility,) is far more positive than in *our* country or their own. They live apart, and I am told, splendidly ; — secure probably from the vexations that embitter a state of society more fluctuating and less definite.

You will perceive, *chère bonne*, that I am beginning to contemplate such matters with a more scrutinizing eye than of old. Previous to my arrival here, with an adviser at once so kind and so wise as yourself ever at hand, I had taken things too much for granted ; and saw them as I wished to see them, not as they were. I was persuaded, for instance, that my prospects in Russia were all sunshine ; and the shock of my disappointment has been

proportionally severe. It was not, however, on that point I intended to enlarge. I wish only to re-assure you touching my discretion for the future; and convince you that I have at length made my own the precept you used to inculcate, of the necessity of surmounting in the consideration of worldly interests;—“*de prendre sa position entre ses deux mains,*” as you used to say, and contemplate it with the eyes of a stranger.

After all, therefore, my momentary shock may prove as serious a benefit to my moral health, as a plunge into a cold bath is said to afford an enfeebled constitution,—that is, provided it prove not fatal. I have ceased to act as if living only from hour to hour, as one does under the happy impulses of youth; and feel accountable to myself for my happiness, as to heaven for my conduct.

After this grave axiom, not of morality perhaps but policy, (and oh! that at eighteen I should have experienced sufficiently bitter

moments to have betaken myself to policy !) it may seem a wild transition to talk of Count Alfred. But as I open my heart to you to its innermost core, it would be less than frank to conceal from you how amused I felt on discovering, at the ball of the French Embassy, the truth of your frequent assurances, that in his own country, or among his own country people, Monsieur de Vaudreuil would not dream of devoting to Marguerite, myself, or any other girl, the attentions into which he permitted himself to derogate among the forests of Rehfeld.

Impossible for even my wild imagination to conceive anything more splendid than the ball of the Duc de Mortémart ! Do not exclaim against my inexperience as the origin of my admiration ; for know that, two nights before, we were present at an Imperial fête—a fête, of all others the most select and inaccessible—given at the Anitschkoff Palace ; a splendid mansion, occupied by Nicholas when Grand

Duke, on the Fontanka Quay, which the Imperial family regard as a private residence, and to which they retire whenever they wish to shake off the pomps of state.

You will readily conceive that the privacy of an Emperor of Russia is far more gorgeous than the utmost attempts at magnificence of other sovereigns ; and though the private fêtes at the Anitschkoff affect simplicity, it is that terrible simplicity of *recherche*, so much more costly than gaudy show. It is whispered that in the intimacy of his family circle, his Imperial Majesty has been heard to call the Empress “Madame Nicholas,” and address his pretty grand-duchesses by the name of “dushinka,” or some other of the Russian diminutives of fondness. But nothing can be more embarrassing than a circle so scanty as to expose every individual severally to the scrutiny of the Empress, who has all the taste for dress of an *élégante* of the Chaussée d’Antin, and all the power of enforcing the same fastidiousness to

others by the glance of an eye not naturally beneficent.

Not a single member of the *corps diplomatique* received an invitation to this ball; and our presence there was a distinction conceded to the favour enjoyed by the Erloff family. This was so distinctly implied, as to mark for the future, not only to ourselves, but to the tribe of Wolkonskys, Orloffs, Potockis, Czernicheffs, Dashkoffs, Strogonoffs, Witgensteins, Woronzoffs, Modenas, and Nesselrodes, constituting the court, of the footing on which we were hereafter to stand among them. No person admitted to the private balls of the Empress, at the Anitschkoff, is susceptible of being exposed to slight.

Had this distinction, therefore, awaited us on the day succeeding my arrival here, before I beheld St. Petersburg in its true light, how elated should I have been! At all events, though as regarded the pride of Ida von Rehfeld, I arrayed myself in the beautiful ball-dress provided

for me by the renowned Madame Hugon, with a heavy or rather irritated heart, I expected that my eyes would be as much dazzled as my soul would remain blank and spiritless. But it was not so! At this imperial *soirée*, the efforts made to appear at ease served only to increase the *gêne* of the affair. Nothing can be more formal than the privacy of Imperial life, which I had heard so loudly praised for its simplicity. The Empress is passionately fond of dancing, and accounted one of the best dancers in Europe. It was to accommodate an imputed infirmity of her gait, that the galoppe was invented for her at Berlin, when still only a Princess of Prussia. But for my own part, I had rather she were less a portion of the company; which, consisting of the *élite* of the court, in the perpetual habit of inter-association, has of course little interest in or for a mere foreigner like myself—at best, an interloper.

Between ourselves, *strictly* between our-

selves, *chère bonne*, I must admit to you, that something in the countenance of the Empress is sovereignly displeasing to me; though I had fancied her almost pretty when I saw her in the morning, accompanied by her charming little girls. Although my countrywoman, I feel less interest in her than in one or two beautiful natives; such, for instance, as the Countess Zavadoska, who has the loveliest countenance I ever saw, and one of the maids of honour, Mademoiselle Yatsoff, the sweetest creature you can imagine. The affability of the Empress appears to *me* studied. Her countenance, naturally harsh, implies, at once, sternness and frivolity. Merit, however, she must possess; or she would not be beloved by a man of such discernment as Nicholas;—on whose commanding person and most imperial presence, I never gaze without feeling that I would fain have been the Empress of such an Emperor.

I am told I must reserve my opinion of the

splendour of the Russian palaces, till I have witnessed some of the fêtes of the Carnival in the Winter Palace and Hermitage, which constitute almost a single palace. Four of the stately halls therein, the Salle St. George, Salle Blanche, Salle de Marbre, and Salle des Maréchaux, occupy six hundred feet in length, and are decorated with all that marble, gilding, and scagliola can impart of splendour. The Anitschkoff is less sumptuous ; though the precious in-laying of foreign woods and marbles, and the exquisite selection of objects of *virtú* from all countries, would have interested me exceedingly, but for the august presence in which we stood, and the charm of a Mazurk, which I had never before seen attempted with characteristic perfection. The Empress is decidedly the most graceful dancer of this I ever saw. Still, the fête was only a specimen of laborious trifling ;—and I quitted it, weary and dispirited.

At the Duc de Mortémart's, on the con-

trary, I was impressed by an agreeable consciousness, arising from I know not what charm of tone—manner—grace—refinement. Everything was less splendidly, but far more pleasingly arranged. Elegance rather than magnificence was the order of the night; not “gold and barbaric pearl,” but flowers in profusion. In short, *chère bonne*, (*car il faut en revenir là !*) everything was completely French!

It was in just such an order of society that I should have been gratified beyond measure to find myself noticed by Count Alfred de Vaudreuil. At the court ball, Count Stanislas Potocki, the grand chamberlain, a friend of my father, presented to me, as my first partner, the young Prince Gargarin; and had Alfred been there, I should have pretended a pre-engagement with *him*, for the pleasure of exchanging my fashionable partner for one who would have stood there on less advantageous ground than myself. But he was not even invited! At his own embassy, I should have

been indeed proud, indeed happy, to find that he had courage to distinguish *me*; and draw the attention of his charming countrywomen towards one for whom in private he has affected so much regard.

So far, however, was this from being the case, that I saw through his panic lest my confidence in his good will should render me too familiar, and betray to the fine world of France, his regard for the daughter of a Silesian Baron—a wretched Fraulein von Rehfeld—unworthy mention by the lips polite of the Faubourg St. Germain!

Do not defend him, *chère bonne*—do not, as your countryman, protest that he is incapable of such meanness:—I tell you, that “*j’ai pris ma position à deux mains,*” and examined it!—I weighed all—I saw through all, and felt—no matter what! But do not be surprised, under such circumstances, to find me growing wonderfully wise.

Tell me, dearest, how came the good

pastor to sanction the absurd lessons of pride instilled into me by my poor Sara?—How came *you*, on arriving at Schloss Rehfeld, and finding me absorbed in such ridiculous pretensions, not to impress upon me that Europe is only a quarter of the globe — Germany only a country of Europe, — — — a province of Germany, and Rehfeld one of the mediocre baronies of that insignificant duchy?— Had I been made to understand this at sixteen, I should not have turned out, at eighteen, so hard of heart and soft of mind; nor buoyed myself out of my depth on empty bladders upon the stream of life, to sink to the bottom the moment I was left alone to the mercy of the current!

But why reproach *you*, when I ought only to reproach myself! How were you to imagine the intensity of pride and ambition inflating the bosom of the simple-looking girl, musing in her muslin frock and silken sash in the old gallery containing the portraits of her ances-

tors, and deriving from the contemplation a fixed resolve to tower above them all !

Will you believe, *chère bonne*, that my vexations here, so far from quelling these aspiring instincts in my soul, seem only to have increased them by opposition—as the constraint imposed upon the bended bow, serves to wing the arrow in its flight. The other day, when my father, urged by I know not what sudden qualm of self-reproof, began to talk to me, as aforetime, of my cousin Wilhelm, and to insinuate that, in consideration for my unconcealable distaste for St. Petersburg and probable pining after home, he had only to accelerate the projected union betwixt me and his nephew, it was as much as I could do to refrain from bursting into assurances that, so far from desiring to return to Schloss Rehfeld, it would afford me satisfaction to be certain I should never obtain a glimpse of the old turrets again ; that I required a higher sphere, a wider field of action ; that I could not breathe, that I could not *live* in such

obscurity!—But I respected his prejudices, and forebore. Time enough to declare my fixed determination against becoming the wife of Wilhelm von Rehfeld, when he is seriously proposed to me by my father.

There have been moments, when, after reflecting upon the insupportableness of a life spent in such utter exile from the joys and refinements of life as Rehfeld, I have felt almost inclined to smile upon our gawky young Englishman, who is said to be miraculously rich, and of a rank entitling him to pretend to the highest honours of the state. These English people have grand seigneurial ideas! They are fond of the pleasures of foreign countries, fond of the pomps of their own. I could bear with *him* far better than with Wilhelm von Rehfeld. The English Ambassador treated Lord Elvinston, at the Duc de Mortémart's, with marked distinction; and one of the attachés, newly arrived here, to whom the magnificent diamonds of the Na-

rischkin family were pointed out as unique, observed that those of Lord Elvinston's hereditary casket were twice as remarkable. The Count de Vaudreuil has, more than once, obligingly recommended him as an excellent *parti*, to Marguerite and myself. Yet, alas! when I repeat the same remark, he evinces no further jealousy than when I recur with affection to our good pastor!

But enough, for the present, of these nonsenses. I am looking anxiously for your letter in answer to my former observations. From *you* I am certain of receiving the truth; and truth arrayed in such becoming garments, as to render it always pleasing and acceptable. —Farewell!

LETTER XI.

FROM MARGUERITE ERLOFF, TO MADEMOISELLE MOREAU.

How drearily, dearest Mademoiselle Thérèse, must your winter be passing; and how often do I think of you with no other companionship than that of the worthy but unsociable Sara, and the echoes of those deserted old galleries; while *we* are enjoying the brilliant pleasures of our gay carnival! Though I can imagine nothing more charming than Rehfeld, surrounded with those I love, or even solitary, during the summer season when the forests and fields supply endless companionship, even I, young and healthy, should shrink from a lonely winter in that old château. How much more must *you* feel the isolation; habituated for so many years to cheerful society, and now debarred by illness from enjoying even

the pleasures within your reach ! I trust you receive the papers we are punctual in forwarding ; and that the packet of books dispatched by the Baron's orders, through the Residenz, a few days ago, will reach you in safety.

I cannot picture to myself Schloss Rehfeld in the dreariness of winter. When we left you, the woods were still arrayed in their autumnal pomp of leaves ; and your noble stream still imparted by its vivifying energy, life to the landscape. But now, the frozen river and leafless woods must, I confess, have somewhat diminished the charm of that noble old pile, of which I can never think without reverence. To *me*, it would still and ever possess a charm indescribable, derived from historical associations and legendary interests. The chamber which Ida would never allow me to occupy, for instance—the chamber with the old carved panelling, which Sara used to call “ Lady Bertha's Oratory,” and to which one

might have attached such bewildering superstitions, but for the existing legend recorded by the old servants of a former Baroness of Rehfeld ; after whose decease, during her husband's absence with the army of Gustavus Adolphus, howbeit her wardrobe was distributed to the poor by her death-bed command, and her remains interred in holy ground, she did reappear twice every day, at matins and even-song in her garment as she lived,—kneeling at the foot of the cross of her oratory, the service whereof she had abjured to cleave to those of the Lutheran church.

Do you remember how cold and pale I used to turn, when Ida encouraged the good nurse to recite to us this and similar traditions of the castle ; till at length, I trembled to make my way alone in the twilight along the old corridors ?—and how dear Ida laughed at my fears, while her cousin Wilhelm suggested that few superstitions but have some holy origin, and that mockery is an instigation of the Evil One ?—

But how is it that I am writing of Rehfeld to *you*, a denizen within its walls, who are wishing for nothing but news of Ida, and assurances of the love she has conquered, and the happiness she is enjoying.

In the first place, then, know that, lovely as you ever found her at Rehfeld, the style of dress she has adopted since her arrival here, renders her fifty times prettier than ever. Ida has taken it into her whimsical head, (and admit that few heads were ever more prone to the caprices of our sex?) to assume in our family circle, the old Russian costume, which even I, a native, have never judged it necessary to wear, except at court. She has a sufficient excuse, indeed, in the becomingness which every one sees and commends; and mama, though usually rigorous in matters of the toilet, has indulged her fancy so far as to impose it on *me* also, in order to prevent any air of eccentricity on the part of my sister. I wish, *par parenthèse*, you could have seen Ida's look of amazement, on learning that at the

grand galas at the winter palace light blue, scarlet, and crimson, are interdicted colours to any person not belonging to the imperial household!—

Prince Sergius Gallitzin was beyond measure pleased and amused on his arrival, to find metamorphosed into two fair Muscovites, the Parisians of whom he had taken leave at Rehfeld, so short a time ago; and his sister, Princess Prascovia, one of the most charming women in the world, though not altogether satisfied of the propriety of the dress for Ida on whom it has the air of a fancy costume, tries to persuade *me* that I ought never to appear in any other. But though Ida, with her fair hair and expressive blue eyes, looks, I assure you, most bewitching in her blue kaftan, and chemisette of plaited cambric—I know not how otherwise to describe it to you,—my poor dark face looks even more dingy than usual when pretending to my national honours.

How wilful and wayward are such preferences ! I, a Russian born, unable to see beauty or find pleasure in our gay villas or stately palaces, am wild after the old Teutonic halls of Germany and their feudal associations, in preference to our modern mansions, which, however grand or commodious, derive no interest from the lapse of ages or their connection with the history of man ;—while Ida, on the contrary, perceives a mystic charm in the quaint old Muscovite costume, which in *my* eyes—irreverent that I am—shows like a badge of barbarism, by comparison with the elegance of dress that used to refresh my eyes at the Hôtel de Vaudreuil.

To return, however, to Ida. Conceive her, pray, attired à *la Russe*, fairer than the fairest of *belles Boyardes*, in our home circle. But you must bring her before you, bounding through a mazurk, in the lightest and freshest of Parisian ball-dresses, of white crape trimmed with wild hyacinths, in order to picture her, as

when pronounced by the Emperor, at the Anitschkoff ball, to be the prettiest *débutante* of the winter.

In *my* opinion, the very perceptible increase of her beauty is derived less from the becomingness of her Russian costume, or the elegance of her French one, than from the air of half-pensive, half-startled timidity, she has acquired in this world of strangers. At Rehfeld—so worshipped—so watched—so waited on—she was surer of herself and others; she had always leisure to be gay, often leisure to be satirical. But at St. Petersburg, even when surrounded by admirers, a certain air of gravity tempers her natural grace. In short, she is charming, and everybody as willing to acknowledge it as you or I.

Your last letter, *chère* Mademoiselle Thérèse, re-assured me concerning the origin of her sadness on first arriving here. But even before I received your representations of the natural regret of a young person for the friends,

scenes, and language of her youth, I was comforted. I began to see that I had mistaken gravity for sadness. Ida appears five years older since she quitted Rehfeld ; but I do not conceive her to be unhappy. Princess Prascovia Gallitzin, sister of Prince Sergius, who, being slightly deformed has never married though a very superior woman, sits in wonderment at the brilliant talents and universal information of your pupil, though afraid to engage her in conversation.

I am assured by all those on a sufficiently intimate footing to discuss the matter, that Baron von Rehfeld stands high in the Emperor's good opinion ; notwithstanding which distinction, his freedom from all pretension commands universal respect. I am indeed fortunate that my mother should have formed a second marriage which, while it secures my personal happiness, is so favourable to our family interests ; and am doubly eager for the arrival of my brother Alexis, from the cer-

tainty of having to welcome him in a home thus cheered and thus embellished.

There exists but one drawback on the comfort of our little circle, (to which my cousin Alfred imparts all the charm of his liveliness and *usage du monde*), in the visits of our English friend, *qui promène ses ennuis chez nous comme pour nous faire honneur!* Hour after hour does he spend among us, saying little or nothing; but apparently of opinion that the little he *does* give himself the trouble to say, ought to repay us for the conversation he extracts in return. I never saw so persevering a querist. They say that most of the English who travel, write books on their return to their own country; and I suspect Lord Elvinston is deriving what information he can from his St. Petersburg acquaintances, to grace his projected travels in Russia. Unfortunately, my cousin Alfred, who knew him in Paris last year, and who has little mercy for the foibles of his friends, suggested

this hint to Ida; who has ever since been favouring our strange guest with the most preposterous scraps of news concerning us. As a foreigner, like himself, she is not bound, she says, to be accurately versed in our habits and usages. But this mystification is hardly fair. Judge how grievously the account he might send forth to the world would compromise both him and *us*!—

I suspect I shall shortly have more to tell you respecting this unhappy man; who, but for his strange awkwardness, appears really amiable and obliging.—Farewell!—Think of us often, and kindly; and rely upon my utmost endeavours to lighten the weariness of banishment to my adopted sister.

LETTER XII.

FROM VISCOUNT ELVINSTON, TO HIS SISTER
THE HON. MRS. LESLIE.

Your last letter, my dearest Mary, upbraids me for my project of passing a winter in St. Petersburg, as though I had announced the most preposterous thing in the world.

“Who ever heard,” you remark, “of any English person passing a *winter* in St. Petersburg !”

Were I to reply that this was possibly one of my inducements, you would twit me, in return, with love of singularity; a favourite charge of yours—though I defy you, in the whole circle of your acquaintance to point out a man less eccentric than myself.

In honest truth, however, I was not a little influenced in my determination, by a desire to

escape the routine of English absentees, who habitually spend their winters in Paris, Florence, Rome or Naples, for the enjoyment of their own dinners, the Boulevards, the *bals masqués*, the Accademia ball, and the Holy week ;—congregating together like a flock of sheep,—and seeing, hearing, feeling, and understanding through a joint-stock set of senses and want of—sense ; a club of stupid starers—an omnibus—an any thing short of rationality and free agency.

In St. Petersburg, on the other hand, there are no English save the resident merchants, and the Embassy set ; the former of whom form an independent order, rebutting the intrusions of the idle and dandified class of the community ; while the latter produce no effect more deleterious than a drop of morphine in the waters of the Neva. One is consequently free to form one's own pleasant friendships and acquaintanceships ; and so respectable has always been our diplomatic footing

here, and so auspicious the connection of the native and English nobility through the Woronzoff and Pembroke families, that one benefits by the limitation. "Milor" is not, as in Paris, a word of mockery; or, as in Vienna, a motive for mistrust. They do not suppose, as in Rome, that we come to be made dupes of, and carry off sham medals and modern antiques; or, as in Greece, to tear down the bas-reliefs, and mutilate the statues of antiquity.

In St. Petersburg, my dear sister, we retain a tolerable reputation. The Russians derive, perhaps, some portion of their respect for our taste, from a circumstance that ought to produce a directly contrary result; the purchase namely, of a large portion of their finest national collections from Great Britain; who, if she could not afford to keep them, certainly could not afford to part with them. From the days of Catherine till now, moreover, their best physicians and best portrait painters have been Englishmen; and an English head-gardener is

held as indispensable at St. Petersburg, as in Paris, an English "grom." An Englishman is consequently estimated here as an accomplished personage.

Still, I repeat, the Thompson and Johnson tribe is wanting. The equivocalists who infest more fashionable capitals, spare that of Russia ; awed by a climate and an Emperor too rigorous to be sported with. Against the former, by the way, such precautions are of necessity adopted, that believe me I never suffered so little from cold as during the present winter. Commend me to a Russian apartment, with its *petch* or stove producing the most genial and agreeable temperature, its double windows and well-baized outer doors, as the safest refuge from the severities of January.

I love a decided climate. In India, or in Russia, one is not ashamed to be on one's guard against the sun or the icicles. The weather is no matter for jest, and consequently no matter for bravado ; while London,

where one is tempted to brave a March wind without a great coat because the sun shines and one's club laughs at one, or Italy, where one dies of a brain fever, because some fellow who has been there a few months longer than oneself, scouts the idea of a *coup de soleil*, constitute my notion of a pernicious climate. However, I have no fault to find with the the iciclo-phobia of my countrymen, of whom three only, besides myself, are idling on the Nevskoï Prospekt.

Your letter entreats me, dearest Mary, since I have done so extravagant a thing as exile myself to the extremity of civilized Europe, to make the most of my advantages and describe to you all I see, hear, and taste, that is out of the common way. By "common way," I conclude you mean "English way;" our noble country having long arrogated to itself the right of giving the law to the universe, subverting the laws and religion of weaker lands, and compelling them to eat cold beef

and pickles, in place of their national boiled rice, *soupe maigre*, or barbecued children, as their climates and circumstances may require. Out of the English way, therefore, I see far too many things to be described within compass of a letter. The booted and bearded Russians sledging along at this moment under my windows on the Anglinskaya, form the very antipodes of the slower paced and smoother faced generation you are surveying from yours, in Park Lane. To you, however, I must concede the advantage of beholding lovely faces and graceful forms intermingling with your Sunday crowd; while here, ladies are never, and women rarely, to be seen in the throng.

With respect to public ceremonies characteristic of these Northern latitudes, I have witnessed nothing so remarkable as the Benediction of the Waters by the Archimandrite, on the Feast of the Epiphany; which, falling by the Greek Kalendar twelve days later than with us, is still, on the 18th of January, a

sufficiently frigid festival to enable the Neva to bear, on ice four or five feet thick, a stately temple, erected opposite the Winter Palace to enable the imperial family to participate in the ceremony, and behold their father and Emperor well soaked in the water of the Neva, administered as though it were holy water, by the hands of the Archbishop. To reach the stream, a hole is cut in the ice in the centre of the temple, which is painted and adorned with religious devices, to gratify the eyes of the whole population of St. Petersburg assembled on the occasion ; and amid the discharge of cannon and shouts of the people, a silver cross is plunged into the icy stream, whose fertility and welfare are especially commended in a prolonged prayer to the protection of Heaven.

At Pesth, a similar operation is performed on the same day, by the Greek Archbishop on the Waters of the Danube ; and at Constantinople, the silver cross is flung with

similar forms and adjurations, into the vasty deep ; so that sea-fish and fresh, turbot and lobster-sauce as well as sturgeon and sterliad, have equally the benefit of this singular grace before meat.

It strikes me, I own, that a blessing on the earth, here so unstable, might be more advantageous than the benediction of the waters. Nevertheless, in this country, which Mrs. Lavinia Ramsbottom might be justified in asserting to have derived its ancient name of Finland from the multitude and importance of its finny tribes, there is some pretext for the grateful devotion of the people during the Archiepiscopal ceremony. The sparkling purity of the Neva water, in the summer season, is calculated to do honour to its efficacy. It forms, indeed, so favourite a beverage with the Russians, as to be bottled up for exportation with the wealthier orders on their journeys. The governor of the fortress, who is privileged to present a goblet filled with it to the Empe-

ror on the breaking up of the frost, receives the vessel filled with gold pieces, in return ; though Nicholas has proved too far North for the said governor ; and on finding the cup extend, year after year, almost in proportion to the annual extension of his own elastic frontiers, has commuted the gratuity, —in order that the pint of water might not expand into a hogshead—for a specific sum.

The St. Petersburgers pretend that the Neva water is indispensable for the concoction of the exquisite tea in which they take such exquisite delight.

I am surprised that the continental nations, who are so fond of ridiculing our Great British passion for the “ cups that cheer, but not inebriate,” so that even the great Goethe, when in jocular mood, used to charge English travellers with carrying their tea-kettles to boil on the crater of Etna, do not criticise the similar propensity of the Russians ; who, receiving the

finest tea from China, go to the greatest expense in perfecting the preparation. The tea provided for an *istvoshtnik*, or hackney-coachman, at his tavern, is, I promise you, of a more delicate species than the finest you ever tasted at Elvinston Castle. In summer, they drink it iced, as they do every other beverage; for the Russians, after looking at nothing but ice all the winter, seem to live upon it all the summer. Every well-conditioned family has its ice-house; and there are more ice-wells in a single district of St. Petersburg, than in the whole of London put together.

The most interesting spectacle on the whole I have witnessed, is the gala held by the imperial family, at the Winter Palace, on New Year's night; when the better order of the citizens are admitted, to the number of five and twenty thousand, to pay the compliments of the season to the Emperor. You can imagine nothing more gorgeous than the effect produced by the illumination of the splendid

halls of which you have heard so much, crowded with people of all nations and languages submitted to the sceptre of the Autocrat;—Russians, and Poles, Tartars, Georgians, Samoyedes, Mongolians, Persians, Cossacks, Greeks, Armenians, habited in their several costumes—bearded, whiskered, mustachioed, smooth—in every form and variety of national habiliment; and preserving in the midst of the densest crowd, the most courtly decorum, owing to the boundless veneration experienced by the most loyal of Empires for its most imperial of Tzars.

I had the advantage of viewing the motley scene in an agreeable manner, having been admitted, in consequence of the illness of one of our attachés, with the corps diplomatique; and can assure you that all you ever read in Arabian tales and believed to be Arabian fables, of pearls the size of pigeon's eggs and diamonds the size of hazel nuts, is verified by the display of jewels of this gorgeous court.

The Empress, who bears her burthen of treasure with considerable dignity, is literally a blaze of splendour; and the effect is not a little enhanced by the presence of her maids of honour, amounting to more than a hundred, who are required to appear in trains of scarlet, which, as well as crimson and light blue, is a privileged colour of the court.

It is not, however, the court which constitutes the charm of the spectacle; but rather the orderliness of so vast an assemblage of joyous, prosperous people, conducting themselves, in the palace of a Prince regarded as the most despotic in Europe, with fifty times more ease, and quite as much propriety, as our own higher classes, in the palaces or mansions of those a grade higher than themselves. But the Russians in general are remarkable for courtesy and deference. The vast assemblage was set in movement by a Polonaise, commenced by the Emperor with the Ambassadors of Austria; and such is the influence of the presence of the

sovereign and his family, that though the richest treasures and most beautiful works of art abound on every side, all ungodly covetings of other people's goods, seemed paralyzed for a time. The whole five and twenty thousand people became for the moment, as it were, the family of the Emperor; to whom, I can assure you, in spite of all we have heard from our Polish friends, his subjects are as fondly and blindly devoted as they were to his grandmother Catherine, whom they used to salute as their *matiuska*, or "dear mother." Father and mother are favourite words of endearment in Russia; and the sovereign invariably addresses his troops as "my children."

By midnight, all was cleared, the Emperor and the Court having retired at eleven to sup in the theatre of the Hermitage; where, the frontage of the boxes being of cut crystal, the lights glittering through, produce a striking effect. This was the most gorgeous and original fête I ever witnessed; but I suspect it requires

a Russian or Turkish despotism to enable a sovereign to receive his subjects, with safety to his property, on so paternal a scale.

A propos to despotism, I must tell you that the *knout* in Russia, like ghosts in England, is a thing oftener talked of than seen in the nineteenth century. To talk of the infliction of the knout on Russian ladies of distinction, as asserted by some of our grumbling friends "*in ski*," at the present day, would be as absurd as to talk in London of burning archbishops at Smithfield.

A propos, my dear Mary, to the gala in question, it was there that, in the Salle Blanche, I was first struck by the splendid effect of the white stucco, which you will find from Whaley, I have sent him over orders to attempt in the new gallery at Elvinston Castle. It is a cement formed of powdered marble, and other dazzlingly white materials, susceptible of acquiring the most polished surface, in the manner of *scagliola*, and of being

painted in oils and gilt in the richest manner. When finished, it has the appearance of the purest porcelain, and nothing can be more exquisite than the effect it produces in well-lighted ball or banqueting rooms.

The Russians imported it from the east, where it is much in vogue. They have a mode of rendering the surface as brilliant as gold or silver, by powderings of *talc*; but in my opinion a pure alabaster whiteness constitutes its greatest charm.

I can describe nothing more brilliant than a state dinner in St. Petersburg, given in a banqueting chamber of this description, and decorated *à la Russe*; that is, having the magnificent dessert on the table when you enter the room, and the services brought round in succession, so as to prevent the senses of smell and sight from being offended by grosser viands, however indispensable fish, soup, and patties to the voracity of human appetite.

This fashion has, I am aware, been adopted

by the Duke of D., and one or two others of my travelled countrymen. But John Bull is impatient of innovations ; and moreover loves to ponder over his turtle and venison. To gaze upon peaches and pine apples, while enjoying his sirloin or saddle of mutton, is to him a breach of the social compact ; and he prefers the old three-courses-and-a-dessert order of things, to a banquet reminding one of some stately Italian fresco of the Marriage of Cana, or a Martinian Belshazzar's feast.

I have only one further question to answer of those contained in your letter—alluding, as a sister's letter ought, to Russian beauty.

In general, they are not fair of feature ; yet some of the most beautiful women I ever beheld or heard of, have been Russians or Poles ;—witness as even you can witness, Madame Zanadoska—witness the portraits of Madame Tatischeff, Madame Narischkin, and Madame Zamoyska.

Their manners are rather piquant than agreeable. They have all the vivacity of the French, without their tendency to exaltation or romance; for nothing can be more matter of fact than the character of the nation. They are consequently safer in all the relationships of life, whether as regards love or friendship.

It happens, however, that the most delightful women I have seen in Russia, are foreign, either by birth or education. The grand Duchess Helena for instance,—the charming wife of the far less charming grand Duke Michael, (Michael appears a name disastrous to modern royalty!) fair, graceful, gracious, accomplished, captivating, is a Princess of Wirtemberg, and deserves, if ever woman did, a place on an imperial throne. Her influence with the Emperor is considerable; and as her health and family circumstances have frequently compelled her to try the air of foreign countries, she has been the means of

conveying to many a court in Europe an impression of the elegance and courtliness of St. Petersburg.

In private life, the family with whom I am most intimately associated, is that of the Baron von Rehfeld, whose wife is a Frenchwoman, whose daughter a German, and whose step-daughter Parisian, by that second nature, education. Mademoiselle Erloff, therefore, though the most attractive girl I have seen since I quitted my own country, is scarcely citable as a Russian, since she knows as little of St. Petersburg as myself.—To describe her to you, would I fear require, if not more leisure than I have to write, at least more than you may have to read, at the close of so long a letter. I will therefore defer, till some future occasion, making you acquainted with *la Marguerite des Marguerites*.

Farewell, dearest sister;—my affection for whom, defies even the atmosphere which,

for the last few days, has put all the ist vosht-niks in St. Petersburg in peril of their noses.

A thousand compliments of the season from a brother whose attachment defies "all seasons and their change"—and even a degree of cold fifty below freezing point.

LETTER XIII.

FROM IDA VON REHFELD TO MADEMOISELLE
THERESE MOREAU.

You little thought, *chère bonne*, that in giving me a commission to execute in St. Petersburg for your friend, the Comtesse de Choisy, you were procuring me a most agreeable acquaintance. The Baroness informed me that it was indispensable for me to deliver the packet in person, as a respect due to the position of Princess W——; and, though reluctant to attempt such a ceremony alone, I congratulated myself on my obedience to the suggestion, on finding in the Princess all one has a right to expect of a Parisianized Russian, of whom Monsieur de Vaudreuil declares that Paris engrafted on St. Petersburg, is alcohol floating on mercury.

Since her widowhood, it seems, the Princess

has spent the greater portion of her time in the south of Europe—a privilege for which, she is said to have paid largely. It is only since the death of the Emperor Alexander, that she has been forced, for the preservation of her estates, to establish herself in Russia. Still, however, the habits acquired during her residence in foreign countries prevail; and she is the only person I have found indulge here in a freedom of speech, rivalling that of Count Alfred.

At our first interview, I conclude she must have taken a fancy to me; for the following day, I received a note from her complaining of a violent *migraine*, and entreating me to pay her a friendly visit *au coin du feu*. The Baroness being absent from home on a round of courtly visitations, I accepted the proposal, and found my new friend literally established *au coin du feu*; for while, her suite of state apartments is necessarily warmed *à la Russe*, with the gigantic stoves in use here, her own

little boudoir has the open fire-place for wood you have described to me as forming so bright a feature in a French drawing-room. Beside it, in the coziest of *fauteuils*, did she instal me; and in an half an hour, I learnt more of the gossip of St. Petersburg than I should in half a dozen years in the society of Madame von Rehfeld; who is, *au fond de l'ame*, Frenchwoman enough to treat me as a nonentity, and perhaps, step-mother enough to regard me as an incipient foe.

“I am delighted to see you in this familiar way,” observed the Princess, “for I was afraid the Baroness might make difficulties. We ought to be fond of each other—since *she* is French by birth right,—*I*—by nature. But we are *not*. We belong to rival factions, and hate each other in the civilest way in the world.”

Till then, I had been unaware of the existence of distinct parties in the great world of St. Petersburg. But it seems that a jealousy

is supposed to exist between the Empress and the grand Duchess Helena; and, as in the case of Kings, in whose innocent names their ministers make peace and war, the adherents of the two great ladies relieve the monotony of a life of courtier-ship, by stirring up ill will between their high mightinesses. Countess Erloff, as a lady of honour, was necessarily engaged from the first moment on the side of the Empress, that is, on the side of *l'Amphytrion où l'on dine*, said the Princess, laughing heartily at her own wit. "Poor woman! she has had a hard life of it!—Ruined before she was born, they forced her to marry a horrible old general, smelling of schnapps and tobacco; and his death, instead of restoring her to independence, left her only more wretched than before. Had not the Empress taken a fancy to her, she must have buried herself alive on her son's ruined estates, where no one would have ever heard of her again."

"It was indeed a fortunate chance," said

I, somewhat surprised at the cool frankness of my new acquaintance ; though I admit that my manner encouraged her to believe me somewhat less than the most devoted of step-daughters.

“ Fortunate for the welfare of her children perhaps ; but, for herself I suspect she had no easy time of it, or she would scarcely have accepted the second marriage she did ; your father having, I am told, no prospect of his present appointment at the time the engagement was made ; and if any thing can exceed the odiousness of the society in St. Petersburg, I should imagine it to be that of a petty German Court.”

I suppose I ought to have felt affronted ; instead of which, I was quite as well satisfied to make a sacrifice of the Residenz, as of my step-mother.

“ I was always led to believe,” — said I, “ that Madame von Rehfeld enjoyed a very happy, as well as a highly honourable

position at court, at the moment of her marriage?"

An expressive gesture implied a decided negative.

"We have reason to suspect that Madame Erloff is no great favourite with the Emperor," she replied. "Under such a disadvantage, how could she lead a pleasant life? In the first place, he dislikes French people in general. In the second, Madame Erloff had excited his displeasure by causing her daughter to be educated in Paris. Nicholas is Russian to the heart's core, as, to do him justice, it is the duty of our Tzar to be; and it is probable he saw from the first, that a woman with Vaudreuil blood in her veins, (left behind here like a wreck on the shore by the breaking up of the exiled Bourbon court at Mittau,) was likely to prove an unwelcome companion to the Strogonoffs, Narischkins, Zouboffs, and their kind, as well as to encourage the Empress in her passion for French gewgaws and French amusements.

However, he put up with her, as he does with anything favoured by the partiality of his family ; though I suspect that the effort made to procure Baron Rehfeld the appointment which facilitated the marriage, arose chiefly from the feeling that the Imperial household would sustain a very reparable loss in the charming Countess Erloff. In the *corps diplomatique*, on the other hand, the idea of a Madame von Rehfeld was supportable."

Such was the Princess's free version of the affair. Very little encouragement on my part soon induced her to add, "To own the truth, the Emperor is supposed to detest her as an *intrigante*, which she certainly is ; and we were consequently the more surprised to hear of you all at the Anitschkoff balls. That the Emperor found you charming, *belle Ida*, and has since mentioned you with the highest admiration, is less wonderful. You have nothing in common with the Baroness ; nay, may be supposed to entertain towards her the anti-

pathy sure to exist between every step-mother and daughter."

Of the latter observation, I took no heed. I was considering, not without emotion, the Princess's allusion to the favourable opinion pronounced upon me by the Emperor. It is impossible for you to understand, *chère bonne*, the honour conferred by Imperial notice in this abjectly servile place.

"To own the truth, I was dying to see you, after all I had heard of your success at the Anitschkoff ball," resumed Princess W. "I was not invited. I have lived too much in France to be well thought of by Nicholas ; and am too much devoted to the Michaëloff set, to stand well in the court *côterie*. By the way, those who see you with envious eyes, pretend that the admiration you excited arose, from a resemblance discovered by the Tzar between you and our lovely grand Duchess as she appeared on her first arrival here, in all the fairness and joyousness of her happy youth."

I expressed myself proportionably flattered ; and am convinced that one of the Princess's motives for soliciting the acquaintance of one so much younger than herself, was a certain feminine curiosity to learn whether the resemblance held good in other respects : the grand Duchess being one of the most accomplished and *spirituelle* Princesses in Europe.

“And what does Madame von Rehfeld intend doing with the young Englishman whom, according to report, she has installed by your fireside ?”—resumed the Princess.

“I have too much filial piety, or perhaps too little curiosity,” replied I, “to have made any inquiry on the subject.” And I trust I looked as little concerned as became me, in making the assertion.

“If she were able to secure him for Made-moiselle Erloff, she would doubtless renounce her projects upon Sergius Gallitzin, who, after all, would be no great match—for he has still his fortune to make.”

“I should not imagine Lord Elvinston the sort of man to be made a dupe of,” I replied.

“So people said of your father, my dear little friend, when Madame Erloff first opened the trenches of her German campaign:—yet you see they were mistaken. She is just the sort of woman to throw people off their guard, by an appearance of being unguarded herself; whereas not a word or movement of hers but has its object. For my part, I suspect that her projects against the Englishman regard neither her daughter nor her step-daughter. The Emperor is supposed to be inclined towards these English just now: in the first place from a natural partiality; in the next, from a desire to mark his animosity towards the French; and Madame von Rehfeld has it consequently at heart to stand well with the British Embassy.”

It was not of course for me to explain to the Princess the real state of the case; but I gave

her to understand that the visits of the young Lord, to our house, were not exactly the result of the Baroness' invitations ;—a remark which I concluded she understood, for she replied by a significant smile.

“The Emperor and Empress are to be present at the ball given next week by the English Ambassadors,” said she ; “a distinction withheld from the Duc de Mortémart because—but I dare say you know the whole story.”

I knew it well ; but remembering the favourite axiom of Monsieur de Vaudreuil, that in order to stand well with the world we must submit to be instructed in many things we understand by people who know nothing about them, I submitted to be told the anecdote of a *bevue*, real or pretended, on the part of the Duc de Mortémart ; who, having invited the *élite* of the Russian nobility to witness the private theatricals in his hotel, gave them by way of a suitable entertainment, in the midst

of their Turkish *démélé*,—the piece of “*L'Ours et le Pacha !*” It is true the epigram was confined altogether to the play bills—the piece bearing no reference that could be misconstrued into offence. But the Emperor's mind had taken the fold of displeasure ;—and who is to smooth an Imperial spirit, when ruffled ?

I am delighted by the way, to hear that the Court *is* to be present at this English fête ; for though it may lose perhaps, in consequence, in ease and spirit, I shall watch with some curiosity the conduct of our *Ours* of an Englishman, as compared with that of Count Alfred under similar circumstances.

“The Gallitzins would be well satisfied to see a marriage concluded between Prince Sergius and your step-sister,” observed the Princess, “on account of the influence supposed to be exercised at court by her mother ; for after all, since the Emperor has overcome in her favour one of his strongest prejudices, some such influence *must* exist. But for *my*

part, I think Mademoiselle Erloff would be much happier in marrying this Englishman, who is of a suitable age, and as rich as Cræsus; whereas Gallitzin has as little to boast in the way of youth as in the way of fortune. I am going to the English ball, and shall make my own observations. It would be a good thing for all of you to get Marguerite well married, and out of the way."

"Not out of mine, believe me," cried I, with perfect sincerity.

"Little hypocrite!"—ejaculated the Princess, with a smile.

"Perfectly sincere, I assure you. Marguerite is the sweetest and most affectionate creature in the world. Marguerite fully reconciles me to her mother."

"So she does many people, or the Baroness would lead a sorry life of it. The worst of it is, that the poor girl herself, unless speedily settled, may be led to take a fancy to that good-looking but good for nothing else, cousin

of hers ; who, even in Paris, where rouéism is canonization, was pronounced too roué by half. I knew him there, two winters ago. Having been intimate with the old Countess Auguste during her emigration, I was a frequent guest at the Hôtel de Vaudreuil ; where, in return for the three or four summers she spent at my country-house, near Tzarsko-çelo, she bestowed upon me divers glasses of *eau sucrée*, and the society of her family, including Count Alfred. To do her justice, it was an exchange that was no robbery, for her *coterie* was one of the pleasantest in Paris ; whereas in my house, she obtained nothing but board, lodging, and the most disagreeable company in the world."

" Do you suppose that there is any likelihood of a connection between the cousins ?" said I, carelessly ; somewhat startled that this should never have occurred to me before.

" Between Marguerite and Count Alfred ?—*Quelle idée !*—The dowry of Mademoiselle Erloff consists in her mother's interest with the

Empress. Of what use is *that* to the Vaudreuil? Alfred possesses a very moderate fortune, and must double it by marriage."

"I understand," said I. "Her mother's interest at court is to marry Marguerite to Prince Gallitzin."

"Exactly. She will then attain a very brilliant position; and the Emperor and all parties be satisfied. It would not surprise me if the Prince were sent to London or Paris, in consequence. He has exactly the qualifications for one of our great embassies."

"I have always understood," said I, inadvertently, "that Prince Gallitzin possessed considerable abilities."

"I did not allude to his abilities. Implicit devotion to the Emperor, a wooden, inexpressive countenance, and square and imposing shoulders, are the grand qualifications for Russian diplomacy. In Paris or London, *il faut savoir prendre une attitude imposante !*"

"If that be the case, poor Marguerite will

make a far less eligible ambassadress than the Prince an ambassador," said I; "for she is the most timid creature in the world."

"Then her dark brows and expressive mouth are no truth-tellers!" rejoined the Princess. "I gave her credit for possessing a decided character under a quiet exterior; and consequently judged her ineligible as an ambassadress. That which is good for the lord, is bad for the lady. Two good heads in one household, is just one too many. But who can surmise what girls may turn out when married?—The dingy cygnet makes the whitest swan;—the yellowest-downed chick, darkens into the blackest fowl. Time will show us Princess Gallitzin in her real plumage."

It would interest you little, *chère bonne*, you, to whom the court of St. Petersburg is terra incognita, were I to recount the many wild hints and surmises in which Madame de Choisy's rattling friend indulged for my amuse-

ment. Suffice it that the *carte du pays* she afforded me, differed, in all respects, from the chart I find laid down at home; and my father with his precise notions, and Madame la Baronne with her almost devotional awe of those higher powers whom at Schloss Rehfeld she affected to hold so lightly, would have been little pleased, could they have surmised the insight I was obtaining into the social mysteries of the court. However, if it be a proof of sense to talk well, it is a still greater to know when to hold one's tongue.—On my return home, I breathed not a syllable of these revelations.

You are, perhaps, tempted to exclaim that it is scarcely less so, to know when to hold one's pen. Let me, therefore, conclude, with a renewal of my thanks for the pleasant acquaintance which you and Madame de Choisy have procured me.

LETTER XIV.

FROM COUNT ALFRED DE VAUDREUIL TO
COUNT JULES.

I have so often had to thank you for amusing me with your adventures, my dear Jules, which derived so much piquancy from the frankness invariably gracing your narratives, that I obey your injunctions to give you a full, true and particular account of the *suite* of my *amourette*.

Know then that of late, my beautiful Ida has taken upon herself the airs of a beauty, and become furiously jealous. Were her jealousy of the right sort, that is, jealousy arising from the intenseness of her affection for *me*, I would forgive her. But, to do it justice, it is a mean passion—the jealousy of an envious

girl. She cannot endure to see Marguerite as much cared for as herself; and our little cousin is so good, gentle, and unpretending, that I feel no indulgence for any angry feeling of which *she* is the object. I am persuaded Mademoiselle von Rehfeld is far more vexed by the idea of her step-sister becoming an ambassadress, than by that of her possessing a certain degree of interest in my heart.

Not but that she is well aware I bestow on Marguerite Erloff only a species of affection she is neither likely to obtain nor desirous of obtaining; a sort of homeish, fireside, trusting, loving love, such as a mere beauty, nay, a beauty exquisitely talented, never yet succeeded in creating.

Be the cause of her jealousy, however, what it may, jealous she has certainly become; and jealousy has had the usual effect of making her unkind and unjust. I, however, remain as just as Aristides—not only just, but justice-

dealing, and am consequently resolved to punish her resentments against my unoffending cousin;—*d'autant plus* that it may restore circulation to my coagulated blood if I contrive to divert myself a little at her expense, or the expense of any other person here.

I was in hopes the French theatre would have done its part towards keeping me warm through the winter, by laughing at its execrable tragedies, and crying at the most barbarously massacred edition of Molière ever suffered to defy the rigour of the laws of decency. But even that pleasure has failed. One could not go on smiling for ever at the complacency with which these savages applaud what they believe to be the French drama; and which might as well have been imported from the shores of the Gambia as from those of the Seine. It is really no fault of mine that I am forced to divert myself a little at the expense of my saucy heroine of the Oder.

You recollect that long-legged Englishman, who used to keep the club in a roar last winter, by the disjointed movements of his dislocated person? He is here, rich as Golconda, and dull as—as—alas ! I can say nothing worse than—“dull as St. Petersburg.” Fancy that I have succeeded in persuading this cold-blooded animal into love with Marguerite Erloff; and the family, including both the girls, that he is in love with Ida. The cross-purposes to which this has given rise, are amusing beyond belief. Aware that Englishmen are the most rash and unauthorized people in the world in such matters, they are hourly expecting Elvinston to blunder out proposals for the hand of the Lily of Rehfeld; of which he has as much intention as I of demanding that of one of the little Grand Duchesses.

Our excellent cousin, the Baroness, who entertains some sort of project for her step-daughter to which I cannot obtain a clue, is always bantering Ida upon the originalities

of her supposed adorer ; whereas, had she a suspicion that this man who, if he chose, could buy up the hundred and fifty thousand serfs which constitute the fortunes of some of the Tartar Princes of this singular country, such as Yousoupoff and others—was *épris* with my cousin, she would be the first to discover in the Viscount, the Chesterfield of modern England. But that I am satisfied Marguerite would earn the knout by refusing this British Cræsus, I could not in my conscience allow them all to go on groping in the darkness visible I have created.

The other night, the English Ambadress gave a ball of singular splendour ; at which the Emperor and Empress, the Grand Duke and his lovely consort, were present. The thing was done in excellent taste ; and though the splendid apartments were perhaps insufficiently ventilated in consequence of the fears entertained by the Empress of taking cold, and

increasing the perilous delicacy of her health. There was no crowd. Not more than three hundred persons were invited; and those the élite of the court and *corps diplomatique*.

Having dined with the Rehfelds, I accompanied them to the fête; and was not a little amused at watching the manœuvres of poor Ida to keep aloof from me, so as to be disengaged for the first dance, in order to give her hand to the only young Englishman of rank now in St. Petersburg, who might therefore be regarded as king of the ball.

I was the more diverted, knowing it to be Elvinston's intention to engage Marguerite; and when he accosted us almost before we had traversed the anti-room or paid our compliments to Lady H., to secure his lovely partner, I could scarcely preserve gravity enough to note the crest-fallen countenance with which Mademoiselle von Rehfeld saw herself supplanted. She seemed to fancy it

must be an oversight, and looked as if she longed to tell him that, in one of his habitual fits of absence, he was mistaking one sister for the other.

Judge, however, of her amazement, nay, of mine, when the Viscount, on receiving a message from Narischkin intimating that he would have the honour of dancing the following quadrille with the Empress, coolly replied that "he had a previous engagement to Mademoiselle Erloff !" The horror of the equerry by whom the message was conveyed and the answer received, was beyond description. His indignation seemed at first too big for words; and the contrast between his flashing eyes and the cool imperturbability of Elvinston, was to the last degree amusing.

The Ambassador, of course, interfered, to prevent so heinous a breach of etiquette as the delivery of such a message; but the air of fretfulness and *ennui* with which poor Elvin-

ston walked through his quadrille, was almost as amusing as the air of profound bitterness of Mademoiselle von Rehfeld, on finding all eyes directed towards my little cousin as the choice of him who had been chosen by the Tzarina.

It was probably the excitement arising from mortification, that lent so vivid a colour to her cheek, and exercised over her susceptible nature the charm said to be contained for others in the cestus of Venus. She really looked divine;—*so* divine, that no one was surprised when the Emperor, after conversing for a few minutes with the Baroness, pursued for more than half an hour his conversation with her step-daughter, whom I had been careful to leave neglected upon Madame von Rehfeld's arm.

There is, I am compelled to own, an instinctive high-breeding in Ida, and a *finesse* in her tone of reply, which Nicholas probably found as refreshing to his ear after the vulgar

subservience of the herd of Petersburgian belles, as the sight of her simple white dress and the natural camellias in her hair, amid the heavy harness of ponderous jewels sustained by the Yousoupoffs, Pashkoffs, Zuboffs, *et hoc genus omne*.

From that moment, alas ! instead of the distinction I had intended to confer upon Marguerite Erloff by Elvinston's homage, it was Ida who became queen of the ball. All eyes were on the new beauty ; and I could perceive, by the singular air of deprecation assumed by our trusty cousin in addressing the lovely Zavadoska, Madame Witgenstein, and others of whom she stands in awe, that she fancied she had achieved a miracle.

The poor Viscount, meanwhile, from the time he could extricate himself from the honours imposed upon him, stationed himself by the side of Marguerite, in order to dance the second quadrille. As usual, timid, grave,

and absent, my little cousin allowed him to lead her to a mazurk that was forming, in the belief that it was another French country dance. There they stood, convicted by the striking up of the orchestra; Marguerite looking marble and motionless, as the statue of a muse—Elvinston awkward, guilty, and ghastly, like the body of a malefactor cut down from a gibbet; for not a step of the mazurk, (which is, as you know, a dance requiring some study), could my poor English victim accomplish. It seemed, however, a breach of etiquette to recede; for the set was not only formed, but included the Empress and several of her ladies of honour. Nothing could be more ridiculous than their position.

I conclude that some mysterious signal must have passed between Marguerite and her step-sister; for, having been compelled to turn round to answer a question addressed to me, *en passant* by the Grand Duke Michael, I per-

ceived, when again able to look towards the dances, that Ida and the young Prince Gâgarin were filling the place of the unhappy couple ; and so admirably, by the piquant grace with which Mademoiselle von Rehfeld executed certain figures rivalling the Cracovienne in sprightliness, that every eye in the room was upon them. The Empress herself, who certainly dances to perfection, was completely eclipsed. The Baroness is too good a courtier to have allowed *her* daughter to display such matchless grace, even had it been possible. But there was no opportunity to afford a suitable lesson to Ida.

Elvinston, meanwhile, all gratitude to the adroit fairy by whose readiness in communicating with her sister, he was indebted for extrication from what was to him an excruciating position, having brought back Marguerite to her chaperon, now mounted guard over her, mute and motionless as one of the twelve

sable Moors who watch, during the court fêtes, the entrance of the gorgeous Taurida palace.

These Englishmen really exceed even the chivalrousness of chivalry in their paroxysms of attachment. Heedless of the ridicule he was incurring by so great a breach of decorum at this open demonstration of devotion to a girl, there did he remain, his eyes fixed upon Mademoiselle Erloff, his arms to his side, and his knees to each other!—It is true, he had previously undergone a rebuke from the Baroness, upon his want of manners in throwing himself coolly into a seat by Marguerite's side; which I could not persuade her was not intended as an insult, but simply a specimen of the free and easy manners of Englishmen when once they throw off their *mauvaise honte*; or rather, perhaps, a proof that they never *do* throw off their *mauvaise honte*, but merely assume a virtue (or a vice) where they have it not.

Madame von Rehfeld, meanwhile, was on thorns. Regarding this awkward appendage to her party as a ridicule attached to it, and attached to it in the shape of an adorer of Ida who was civil to her daughter merely for the sake of another, she had hardly patience with either Marguerite or her Amadis; more particularly when she saw the enthusiasm commanded among the Russians by the admirable style in which the Lily of Rehfeld contrived to execute their national dances. The admiration of the Emperor was, of course, the finger-post which had served to point out her merits to their admiration; but once noticed, it was impossible to withdraw their eyes. Even that immensely dull fellow, Sergius Gallitzin, who *deo volente* is, some day or other, to have the honour of an alliance with the Vaudreuil, fixed upon her those two cold grey eyes accustomed to dwell only upon parchments and *précis*; apparently of opinion, with all the rest

of the room, that for the future, the Empress of all the Russias would no longer pass for Empress of all the dancers.

The fête was a very brilliant one—the supper excellent—and every thing arranged in that admirable style which in the English embassies at St. Petersburg, Vienna, and other continental cities, serves to convince one of the utter want of taste of the English. Between the dulness of their entertainments in London, and the brilliancy of their entertainments in all other places, it is clear how much their riches and prodigality are able to accomplish, the moment they become directed by the better taste of foreign nations.

As regards my private diversions, I am becoming a degree better satisfied with St. Petersburg. I scrupulously avoided from the first yoking myself exclusively to the car of the Rehfelds ; for my Lily—though really a lily, and now an imperial one, does not prevent

my seeing that there are roses in the parterre. I contrive to put some vanity into my pleasures. One is not thrown away here. People know how to appreciate one. The Russians, with their serfs, and splendours, and beautiful wives, are the most *ennuyé* of Satan's creatures. They possess a strong appetite for pleasure, money to bring it withal, but alas ! not a particle of the article in demand is forthcoming for purchase !—Any novelty, therefore, whether natural, artificial, or abstract, is welcomed as a god-send. In Alexander's time, they used to gamble beyond all precedent of gambling ; and attempt a thousand other things, better adapted to the latitudes of Paris, than those of St. Petersburg. Now, the moral and most domestic tone of the court, forbids outrageous breaches of propriety ; and the only thing remaining to divert them, is a detestable French theatre, and still more detestable French ballet and Italian Opera ; for which,

they bribe to their frozen capital, at the cost of their weight in gold, (and that they are heavy enough, the Lord he knows!) all the worst performers in Europe;—the leavings of the impresarios—with now and then a star of some magnitude;—to be amalgamated with their native screamers of screams, and throwers of summersets.

On the other hand, they possess a charming pastime exclusively national, in which, as is the case with most national diversions in most countries, it is *mauvais ton* to take delight; the ice-hills,—which we formerly attempted to imitate at our public gardens of Paris, under the name of *Montagnes Russes*, by means of an inclined plane of boards, with ropes and pulleys, and at the cost of limbs innumerable, and a life or two per season;—as if any thing save the glassy surface of ice could impart to the gliding sledge the ease as well as rapidity of movement essential to the enjoyment of the

real pleasure of the thing,—the presence of the favoured fair one condescends to place at one's feet, in order to dash with her down the all but perpendicular descent, which might be accepted as emblematical of the fall of the angels.

After boring oneself to annihilation by playing whole evenings with these lovely Scythians their stupid game of *La Mouche*, or the still stupider proverbs and *petits jeux* out of which they contrive to extract every particle of gaiety and colour, it is really invigorating to pass the following morning with them in precipitating oneself down an ice-hill. Furred to the chin, like Laplanders, and squatting in our sledges with nearly their national grace of attitude, several brilliant parties in which I have been engaged have dashed down, again and again, their fifty feet, with a degree of perseverance, engendering a frightful appetite for sterlet soup; though, by the way, the people here do

their utmost to render dinner impossible, through the ardour with which they stimulate their hunger by an anti-meal, called the Schälchen, consisting of all the filthiest compounds devised by a Greenlander's *cuisine*—caviar, cheese, salt-fish, and sausages redolent of garlick,—accompanied by brandy and other spirituous liquors. All they leave to be desired is a dose of assafoetida to overpower, by a single *mauvaise odeur*, the concatenation of disgusting smells emitted by their delicate repast. What purpose it can serve, unless to act as a foil to the good French dinner it enhances by force of contrast, I cannot possibly conjecture.

I began this letter with the ball of the English Embassy; and, rondeau fashion, will finish it with a recapitulation of the strain.

Imagine the triumph of my little Saxon charmer, when invited by the Emperor for the cotillon! Instead of seeming to participate in

the awe which, in spite of all their protestations to the contrary, is always and clearly inspired by the conversation of the Tzar into the hearts of his subjects—however fair, however high and mighty—Mademoiselle von Rehfeld made herself as unembarrassed and agreeable a partner to him as she could have been to me ; that is, far more lively and agreeable, I flatter myself, than she would have been with me ; for I hold it no compliment when a woman is sufficiently at ease with one to make herself agreeable. *I* love to see them downcast, timid, even awkward. I like them to be properly influenced by my presence.

The Emperor, however, was satisfied ; though he walked through the cotillon with his usual *nonchalance* in such matters, and probably merely to gratify the Heytesburys by taking part in their ball, no matter with what partner. It was noticed around me that for some time

past, Nicholas had not been seen in such cheerful spirits ; and trust me that, in a city where every change of the Imperial countenance influences rain and sunshine, the public funds, and the pleasures of private society, these people know how to calculate to the millionth part of a degree, the rise and fall of such a barometer.

I have not been near the Rehfelds since the ball. Methinks I could not stand the saucy countenance of this little wren which, ever since, has probably fancied itself an Imperial eagle.

As to poor Elvinston, who was evidently born to become a very great man or a very ridiculous one, so indifferent is he to the opinions of the world and so careless of the usages of society, his devotion to Marguerite Erloff was so ludicrously manifested throughout the evening, that I saw many a contemptuous shrug on the part of the *grandes dames de*

la cour demonstrate their contempt for the ill-manners of the English people; who, if one is to believe their own account of themselves, are too polished in mind to require the polish of deportment held important by other civilized nations, and too moral to see that the wives of one's friends are pleasanter company than their daughters.

You ask me for political news, dear Jules! On that head, spare me, and spare yourself. The nearest approach to political news, properly so called, one ever obtains here, is intelligence of the colour of the Empress's new bonnet; or a whisper concerning the number of salutations performed by the Emperor to his loving subjects between the palace and the parade. Nobody here talks politics.—The politics in vulgar circulation, are, it is well known, so wide of truth, that it is mockery to repeat them. In affairs of state, according to

the Russian system, the surface is so far from the centre, that—

But if I ask you to spare me politics, let me in return, spare you rhetorical illustrations! Suffice it that those reports of the day generated in Paris by a few leading coteries, and in London by a few leading clubs, are wholly wanting here. When you hear in St. Petersburg, a phrase commencing “it is said,” be assured that it will end with the announcement of a variation of the thermometer; or that at worst, the catastrophe deplored regards a few coachmen, lacqueys, or horses, frozen in the streets at the close of the last night’s ball. Do not take me quite *au pied de la lettre*! You know me well enough to pronounce your own verdict.

Elvinston is just come in, with very red eyes, and is waiting for me to seal my letter to unbosom his griefs. I am convinced he has been refused, either by the mother or the daughter;

most likely the latter, for mammas seldom frown upon such people. The greatest calf on earth, if a golden one, has a sure chance of it !
Adieu !

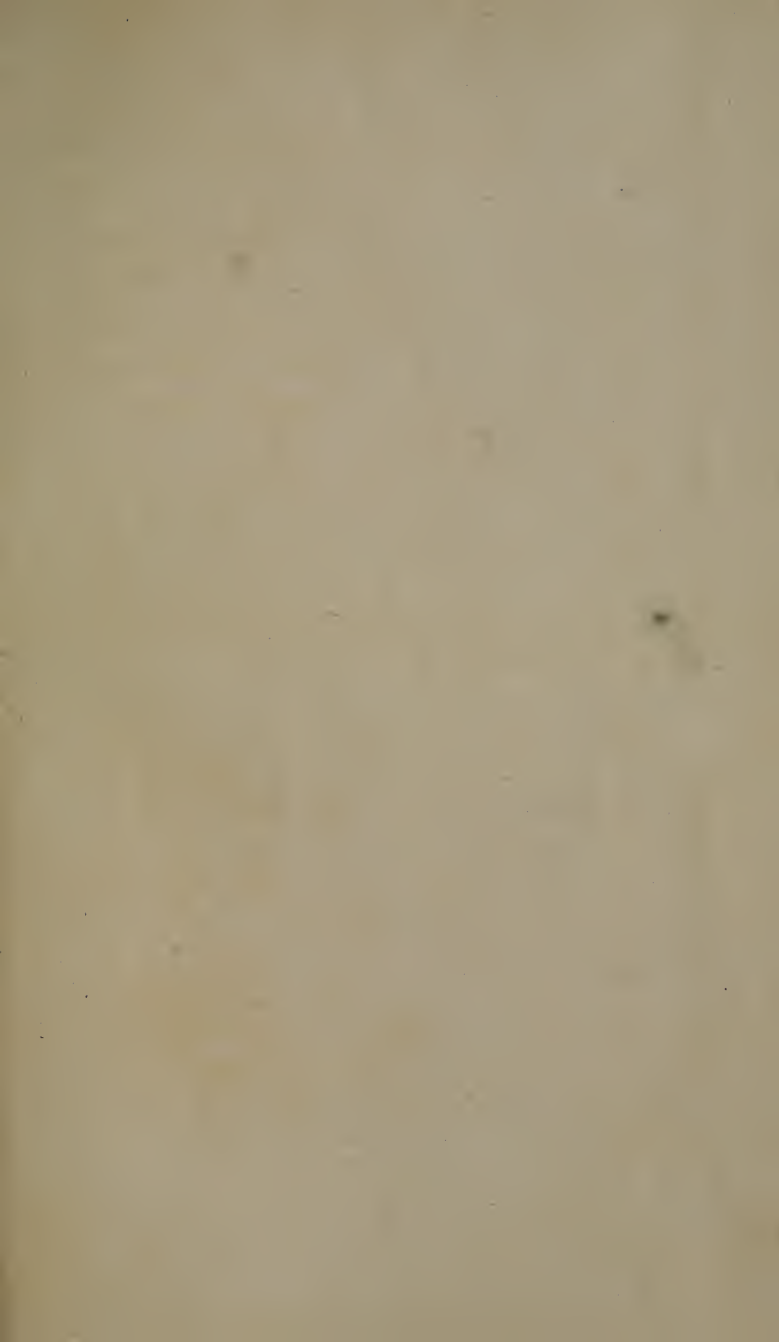
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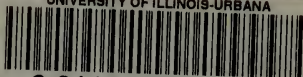
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